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SOCIAL COHESION, PEACE & JUSTICE SURVEY 2026

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HARVARD HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CONTEXT

This report presents the results of a nationwide survey of 1,000 randomly selected adults on public attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding basic needs, justice, and inter-ethnic relations. The analysis is complemented by additional data from a targeted oversample survey of 1,120 randomly selected adults across eight preselected municipalities, as well as findings from six focus groups.

The research was conducted nearly thirty years after the end of the war, at a time when questions of accountability, memory, trust, and coexistence remain deeply relevant to public life. While much has changed since the 1990s, the findings show that the legacy of the war continues to shape how people think about justice, institutions, victims, and relations between communities. Data collection also took place during a period of heightened political tension in early 2025, following the conviction of Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the subsequent institutional standoff between Republika Srpska authorities and state level institutions. The findings should therefore be read against the background of both long term post war challenges and immediate political uncertainty.

MAIN FINDINGS

The findings present a complex picture of public attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everyday needs dominate people's personal priorities, especially health, finances, employment, housing, and family responsibilities. Yet justice and inter-ethnic relations remain important when framed as public and collective issues. The survey does not show a population focused only on the past, but it also does not show a society that has fully moved beyond it. Instead, unresolved justice, limited trust, political dysfunction, and contested memory continue to shape attitudes toward stability and coexistence.

A recurring pattern is the difference between everyday local coexistence and deeper forms of engagement. Many people describe relations in their municipality more positively than relations in the country overall, and most believe different ethnic groups can participate freely in many aspects of daily life. At the same time, progress is seen as limited, participation in shared activities is uneven, and conversations about war, politics, identity, and memory remain difficult. Political leaders, corruption, ethnic nationalist politics, and media narratives are repeatedly identified as part of the problem.

Justice findings point to a similar tension. Most respondents do not believe justice has been fully achieved, and domestic war crimes trials are viewed with skepticism. Yet respondents continue to support justice efforts, including prosecutions, truth telling, victim recognition, compensation, and memorialization. Justice remains relevant, but it is understood more broadly than trials alone.

The report is organized around 15 key analytical findings, summarized below:

1. Daily needs come first, but justice and cohesion matter. People are primarily focused on immediate personal needs. Health, financial stability, family care, housing, and jobs dominate personal priorities, while justice for wartime events and improving relations with other ethnic groups are mentioned much less often. However, direct questions on justice and social cohesion show that both remain important collective priorities.

2. Politics and corruption are seen as central challenges. Respondents most often understand the country's problems as political, systemic, and economic. Political leaders are identified as a root cause by 48% of

respondents, while corruption is cited by 45%. Focus group discussions also link corruption, political loyalty, and weak accountability to access jobs, services, and influence.

3. **Slow progress but high demand for improved inter-ethnic relations.** Inter-ethnic relations are viewed more positively locally than nationally. Most respondents describe relations in their municipality as positive or very positive, but about half say local relations have stayed the same over the past decade. This helps explain why support for continued efforts remains high.

4. **Coexistence exists, but deeper engagement remains limited.** Many respondents report having friends, colleagues, or classmates from other ethnic groups, and 61% say there are places where people from different backgrounds can meet. However, regular participation in inter-ethnic activities is limited, membership in diverse associations is low, and sensitive topics remain difficult to discuss.

5. **Divisive politics, war legacies, and education limit progress.** Respondents identify ethno-nationalist politics, the legacy of the war, lack of trust, media misinformation, economic inequality, discrimination, and stereotypes as barriers to improved relations. Schools are viewed ambivalently: they are not widely seen as worsening relations, but they are also not consistently seen as helping young people process the past or build mutual understanding.

6. **Support for high standards for public office.** Most respondents believe that individuals accused of wartime crimes serving in public roles would damage both inter-ethnic relations and trust in institutions. The majority oppose allowing people accused but not convicted of war crimes to serve in public positions.

7. **Limited trust and low engagement hinder inter-ethnic efforts.** Although improved inter-ethnic relations are widely seen as important, no actor is broadly trusted to lead this work. Schools, NGOs, cultural and ethnic organizations, and international organizations receive some recognition, but no institution stands out. Only 3% of respondents report direct engagement in initiatives to improve inter-ethnic relations.

8. **Public support for practical cooperation and reforms.** Respondents identify practical and reform-oriented ways to improve relations, including more contact between groups, joint community projects, cultural exchanges, reducing ethnic bias in education, ending ethno-nationalist politics, prosecuting politicians who fuel tensions, and eradicating discrimination.

9. **Justice remains incomplete as continued action is supported.** Very few respondents believe justice for war crimes has been fully achieved or that the legacy of the war has been fully addressed. Justice is understood broadly, including trials, truth telling, acknowledgment, compensation for victims, community reconciliation, and an end to the celebration of war criminals.

10. **Public awareness of domestic war crimes trials remains limited.** Domestic war crimes trials remain distant from much of the public. Awareness of past and ongoing prosecutions is limited, and direct involvement with investigations, testimony, or trial attendance is rare. Most information comes through television and social media.

11. **Trust in domestic war crimes trials is limited by concerns about fairness, bias, and corruption.** Trust in domestic prosecutions is weak. Many respondents believe trials do not sufficiently focus on crimes committed in their own municipality, and concerns about political influence, corruption, lack of transparency, and bias are widespread.

12. **Trial effectiveness is questioned, but demand for more prosecutions remains.** Respondents are skeptical about whether domestic trials have effectively delivered justice or improved inter-ethnic relations. Yet this skepticism does not translate into rejection of prosecutions. Most respondents still consider continued domestic prosecutions important.

13. **Victim recognition and support remain insufficient and uneven.** A large majority of respondents report some exposure to wartime violence, yet many believe victims' needs remain inadequately addressed. Legal rights and recognition, psychological support, financial compensation, and medical care are seen as important, while government support is often viewed as insufficient.

14. **Truth remains contested, but dialogue and truth seeking are supported.** Many respondents feel they understand the events of the 1990s, but few believe there is strong agreement across ethnic groups about what happened. At the same time, many support dialogue, independent documentation, joint memorial activities, balanced media coverage, and continued efforts to locate missing persons.

15. **Memorialization is supported, but risks deepening divisions without inclusion.** Memorialization is widely recognized as part of dealing with the past, but it is not clearly experienced as unifying. Many respondents see memorialization as neutral or divisive, especially where commemorations are shaped by politics or competing narratives. Most support the right of all ethnic groups to memorialize civilian victims, but inclusive and victim centered processes are essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to ten recommendations that should be pursued together. Basic needs, social cohesion, justice, institutional trust, victim recognition, truth seeking, and memorialization are closely connected. Addressing one without the others risks leaving the underlying problems unchanged.

1. Treat basic needs as an entry point for social cohesion and justice. Healthcare, employment, housing, infrastructure, youth opportunities, and family support should be implemented transparently and inclusively, especially in mixed communities and return areas.

2. Rebuild trust in institutions through accountable governance. Greater transparency, merit based recruitment, public accountability, and stronger oversight of local and national institutions should be prioritized.

3. Invest in practical local cooperation, not only dialogue. Programs should create repeated and visible opportunities for people to work together on shared concerns such as infrastructure, youth activities, environmental issues, business initiatives, health, education, and community services.

4. Increase the reach, visibility, and credibility of cohesion initiatives. Peacebuilding and cohesion programs should expand beyond existing civil society circles, communicate their purpose clearly, and assess whether they increase participation, trust, cooperation, or willingness to engage.

5. Strengthening education as a long term foundation for social cohesion. Education reforms should support balanced historical learning, critical thinking, civic education, teacher training, shared extracurricular activities, and opportunities for young people to meet across community lines.

6. Create safe spaces for difficult conversations. Dialogue on the war, identity, politics, and memory should be structured, locally grounded, and facilitated in ways that promote respectful exchange rather than forced agreement.

7. Strengthen the credibility and transparency of domestic justice processes. Continued prosecutions should be accompanied by stronger case management, protection from political interference, better public communication, adequate resources, and improved support for victims and witnesses.

8. Combine prosecutions with truth seeking and acknowledgment. Justice policy should include documentation, acknowledgment, apologies where appropriate, public education, reparations, and efforts to locate missing persons, alongside continued prosecutions.

9. Improve victim recognition and support across all communities. Support systems should provide legal recognition, psychological support, medical care, financial compensation, and social services regardless of ethnic background, location, or political connection.

10. Make memorialization inclusive, victim centered, and locally legitimate. Memorials and commemorations should involve victims' families, affected communities, local residents, experts where appropriate, and municipal authorities, while avoiding political instrumentalization.

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not face a choice between addressing basic needs and addressing justice or social cohesion. The evidence points in the opposite direction: economic security, public services, institutional trust, credible justice, victim recognition, and everyday cooperation are mutually reinforcing. Sustainable progress will require practical local work, stronger institutions, and continued attention to the unresolved legacies of the war.

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

Three decades after the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the 1992-1995 Bosnian war, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. The three main ethnic groups largely organize through separate political parties, media outlets, and public institutions, creating parallel societies with few meaningful intersections. Political leaders often emphasize differences rather than shared interests, reinforcing wartime divisions and making cooperation between communities difficult.

The agreement ended large-scale violence but also established a complex, ethnically based political system that continues to shape Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions and social landscape.[1,2] Governance remains fragmented and often paralyzed at multiple administrative levels by ethnic veto powers and poorly coordinated administrative structures, undermining both the consistency of policy reforms and the capacity of public institutions to provide for all citizens.[3] Efforts at reconstruction and reform in key sectors such as policing, health, and education have repeatedly stalled or reinforced divisions, reflecting the tensions between the ambitions of state-building and the realities of local, ethnically structured power sharing.[4,5]

In many areas, the legacy of wartime atrocities remains unresolved and continues to shape public life and attitudes toward reconciliation, coexistence and justice.[6] People from different backgrounds do work together, attend the same schools, and share neighborhoods, but memories of the war continue to undermine social cohesion, shaping opportunities and interpersonal relationships. In communities that were heavily affected by violence, divisions are even more visible, influencing education, employment, and public life. Positive examples of cooperation and reconciliation do exist, yet they rarely gain wider recognition in the political sphere. Civil society organizations play an important role in fostering dialogue and rebuilding trust, but their initiatives often struggle to compete with the louder voices of political elites who benefit from maintaining separation and suspicion between communities. International actors have also provided important support, but these efforts often fall short of the long-term and locally rooted engagement needed for sustainable reconciliation.[7]

In this context, questions of justice, particularly the search for the missing, the prosecution of perpetrators, and the recognition of victims, are among the most sensitive and contested issues. Since the war ended, courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina have prosecuted nearly eight hundred war crimes cases, making it one of the most comprehensive domestic war crimes prosecution efforts in the world.[8] The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia also indicted 161 high-level perpetrators, including political and military leaders, creating important precedents for accountability globally.

The pursuit of transitional justice, however, has yielded mixed results. Trials and memorials are frequently interpreted through nationalist perspectives, sometimes deepening social cleavages.[9,10] Denial of established crimes, including the genocide in Srebrenica, continues alongside rising hate speech targeting different ethnic groups. With more than three thousand reported war crimes cases still pending investigation, many survivors fear their cases will never be heard. This reality has created widespread skepticism about whether criminal prosecutions alone can deliver the justice and acknowledgment that victims and their communities still seek. [11,12]

As a result of these challenges, trials that were widely framed as instruments for rebuilding trust between ethnic groups, for example by exposing the truth and punishing perpetrators, have not fundamentally transformed interethnic relations. [13,14] Instead, denial and revisionism continue to legitimize nationalist narratives, with political and media elites actively promoting revisionist accounts to mobilize support and sustain ethnic boundaries.

In this context, efforts to strengthen social cohesion and justice have been fragmented. Comprehensive data on public attitudes and needs is crucial for informing discussions about dealing with the past and designing effective strategies

for social cohesion and transitional justice. Opinion research can provide policymakers with valuable insights into the views and priorities of ordinary citizens across the country, helping to ensure that policies are grounded in evidence and reflect the needs of the broader population. By understanding what citizens believe would help their communities heal and move forward, policymakers can develop more targeted and effective initiatives, ultimately leading to more sustainable and inclusive reconciliation processes.

This report presents the findings of a mixed-method study that combines a nationwide survey with in-depth research in selected municipalities, including surveys and focus groups. This comprehensive approach aimed to capture the complexities of social cohesion, transitional justice, and dealing with the legacy of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing a nuanced understanding of the attitudes and experiences of citizens across the country. The study's findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of BiH citizens, laying the groundwork for further research, policy, and programming. By shedding light on the perspectives and experiences of ordinary citizens, this report can inform a more responsive and effective approach to reconciliation, one that is grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. ■

STUDY DESIGN, SAMPLE AND LIMITATIONS

STUDY DESIGN

This study was designed to assess attitudes and opinions of adult citizens across Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding social cohesion and transitional justice using a mixed-methods approach. The research consisted of two integrated quantitative survey components and a sequential, explanatory qualitative component. Each component was designed to produce findings relevant at the national and local levels, informing ongoing efforts toward reconciliation and understanding in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 1: Study components



National survey (n=1000)

A face-to-face, household survey of randomly selected adults across Bosnia and Herzegovina, utilizing Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) to ensure standardized data collection and maximize data quality.



Municipality surveys (n=1120)

Targeted oversample surveys conducted in eight preselected municipalities, allowing for more detailed analysis of local perspectives on study topics.



Qualitative Focus Groups

Six online focus group discussions convened virtually across three regions, with groups structured by age and ethnicity to explore social cohesion and justice issues in more depth.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING METHODS

The nationwide survey targeted a representative sample of 1,000 adults (aged 18+) residing across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sampling employed a multi-stage, stratified random probability design using the latest (2013) national census as the sampling frame. The sample was first stratified by entity (Federation of BiH, Republika Srpska, Brčko District) and then by 16 defined geographic regions, which include both official cantons in the Federation and statistical regions in Republika Srpska, and Brčko District. Within each region, sampling was further stratified by settlement size (small, medium, large municipalities).

Primary sampling units (PSUs) were randomly selected municipalities in each region, followed by a random selection of enumeration areas (secondary sampling units, SSUs) within those municipalities, using probability proportional to size (PPS) methods. Within each selected enumeration area, up to 10 households were randomly chosen using a random walk protocol. In each selected household, one respondent was randomly selected using the "closest birthday" method. Up to three call-backs were attempted to increase response rates. Interviewers recorded all

sampling outcomes using GPS-enabled CAPI software for quality assurance. Using this sampling results in estimates with a margin of error of ±5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level, accounting for the clustered design.

For the in-depth municipality-level surveys, eight preselected municipalities were identified for oversampling, with a target of n=140 interviews per municipality. The eight municipalities selected for in-depth surveys were purposively chosen due to their significant inter-ethnic tensions and / or distinctive war-time experiences, these include: Bratunac, Prijedor, Rogatica, Busovača, Capljina, Goražde, Stolac, and Velika kladuša. The sampling methodology mirrored that of the nationwide survey: stratified, multi-stage random sampling by settlement type, with enumeration areas and households selected randomly and interviews conducted using face-to-face CAPI. This approach ensured local representativeness and comparability to the national sample. This sample size results in an approximate margin of error of ±10 percent at the 95 percent confidence level, accounting for the clustered design.

For the focus groups, participants were recruited by interviewers using a standardized screening questionnaire and outreach within the local communities in Brčko District, Prijedor, and Stolac. Recruitment aimed to reflect diversity in gender, age, education, occupation, and ethnicity (as relevant). Ineligible individuals included those connected to research staff, employed in media or marketing, or who had participated in similar research within the past year. Each group included 6–10 participants.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The research team developed a comprehensive, structured questionnaire to address the study's objectives. The instrument was designed to capture views on social cohesion, inter-ethnic relations, war experiences, transitional justice, and related topics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The final questionnaire included questions on key demographics, personal and community priorities, inter-ethnic relations, social participation and contact, perceptions of security, exclusion, and discrimination, war experiences and legacy, transitional justice and accountability, victim support, and psychosocial wellbeing.

The instrument consisted of both closed- and limited open-ended questions and, where appropriate, utilized validated scales for mental health and victimization. This instrument was initially drafted in English, then translated and back translated into local languages. Input from key stakeholders and subject matter experts was sought throughout the process to strengthen cultural appropriateness and clarity. A pilot test involving at least 50 respondents was conducted to assess understanding, question flow, translation quality, and length. Feedback from the pilot informed final revisions.

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured discussion guide was developed to mirror key themes from the quantitative survey. The guide covered topics such as inter-ethnic relations, experiences and perceptions of justice and reconciliation, social cohesion, the legacy of war, and priorities for the future. Questions were designed to elicit open, in-depth responses and allowed for probing on sensitive issues. Each focus group session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was moderated by trained facilitators.

DATA COLLECTION

All data collection activities were coordinated and supervised by Prism Research. For the quantitative survey, face-to-face interviews were conducted in respondents' homes using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. Interviewers received standardized training covering research ethics, survey administration, quality control, and respondent engagement protocols. Fieldwork was carried out during March and early April 2025, with continuous field monitoring and quality assurance measures. Response rates and demographic quotas were closely monitored to ensure sample representativeness. The final response rate for the survey components was 42% , which is consistent with response rates typically observed in face-to-face public opinion surveys conducted in the region.

For the qualitative component, trained moderators facilitated six online focus group discussions lasting approximately 90 minutes each. Participants were recruited using a standardized screening process and received a modest honorarium for participation. All sessions were audio- and video-recorded (with consent) for accurate transcription and in-depth thematic analysis.

All data were electronically recorded, systematically checked for accuracy and consistency, and securely stored. Prior to analysis, all quantitative and qualitative data were fully anonymized to protect respondent confidentiality. Data from the quantitative surveys was exported from the CAPI system and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations by municipality, demographic variables, and other key factors were produced. Sampling stratification and weighting were applied as appropriate to ensure accurate national estimates. Qualitative data from focus group transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, differences, and illustrative quotations relevant to the study objectives. The study protocol, instruments, and consent procedures were reviewed by national experts, including specialists in research ethics and psychology. All participants received information about the study, provided informed consent, and were assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

NATIONAL SURVEY

The nationwide survey sample was balanced by gender (49% male, 51% female) and covered a range of age groups, with 31% aged 18–35, 26% aged 36–49, and 43% aged 50 or older. Most respondents were married (57%), with 27% reporting they were single. The education profile showed 56% had completed secondary education and 27% reported education higher than secondary level.

Employment status was diverse: 43% reported full-time employment, 15% were unemployed and seeking work, and 22% were retired. In terms of income, 29% reported monthly household earnings up to 1,000 BAM, and 34% reported 1,001–2,000 BAM. The majority (85%) described their household economic status as average for their community.

Ethnic backgrounds were primarily Bosniak (54%), Serb (33%), and Croat (9%), with small proportions preferring not to answer. Religious affiliation mirrored ethnic makeup, with 53% identifying as Muslim, 32% as Orthodox, and 9% as Catholic.

▼ *Table 1: Sample characteristics – nationwide survey*

Gender		Age			Marital status					Education			Ethnicity			
Women	Men	18-35	36-50	51+	Single	Married	Cohabitating	Divorced	Widow(er)	< Secondary	Secondary	Higher	Croat	Serb	Bosniak	Other
51%	49%	31%	26%	43%	27%	57%	3%	7%	7%	17%	56%	27%	9%	33%	54%	4%

MUNICIPALITY SURVEYS

Demographic profiles varied considerably across municipalities, reflecting both local population structures and the nature of the municipal samples. Gender, age, education, employment, income, ethnic background, and religious affiliation differed by location. For example, some municipalities included older respondent profiles, while others had larger shares of younger respondents. Education and employment levels also varied, reflecting different local social and economic conditions. Ethnic profiles similarly varied by local contexts. Some municipalities were more homogeneous, while others included more mixed populations or significant representation from different ethnic groups. For this reason, municipality level results in the report are presented primarily as contextual and comparative findings. They are used to show how attitudes differ across selected localities, rather than to make broad statistical claims about all municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

LIMITATIONS

While the study was designed and implemented using rigorous methods, several limitations should be noted. As with any survey, the findings may be affected by non-sampling errors, including nonresponse, social desirability bias, recall bias, interviewer effects, or data entry errors.

Several measures were taken to reduce these risks. The survey instrument was carefully designed and tested to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and logical flow. Interviewers received standardized training on research ethics, interviewing techniques, probing, and quality control procedures. Fieldwork protocols included random selection procedures, respondent eligibility checks, and GPS enabled CAPI devices to support accurate data collection. Supervisors conducted field monitoring and spot checks, and all data were reviewed for consistency and completeness. Response rates and demographic quotas were also tracked during fieldwork to reduce nonresponse bias.

The use of 2013 census data as the sampling frame may have introduced some coverage limitations, particularly in areas where population movements have occurred since the census. This is especially relevant in post conflict settings where displacement, return, migration, and demographic change continue to shape local populations. The sampling strategy sought to reduce these risks through stratification by region and settlement size, as well as probability proportional to size methods when selecting enumeration areas.

The municipality surveys should be interpreted with particular caution. They were designed to provide additional local insight into selected municipalities, not to serve as fully representative standalone profiles of each locality. Some municipality samples differ from the expected local demographic composition, including in relation to ethnicity, gender, age, or education. These differences may reflect small sample sizes, demographic change since the 2013 census, selective out migration, different response rates among groups, or reluctance by some respondents to disclose sensitive information. For this reason, municipality level findings are used in the report primarily to illustrate local variation and provide contextual comparison, while the nationwide survey remains the main basis for country level conclusions.

The qualitative component provides important context for interpreting the survey findings. However, focus group participants were purposively selected and are not statistically representative of the broader population. Recruitment followed a standardized screening process, and moderators were trained to use a structured guide, neutral language, and balanced facilitation. The focus group findings should therefore be understood as illustrative of lived experiences, local narratives, and possible explanations for survey patterns, rather than as representative evidence. ■

RESULTS
1. PRIORITIES

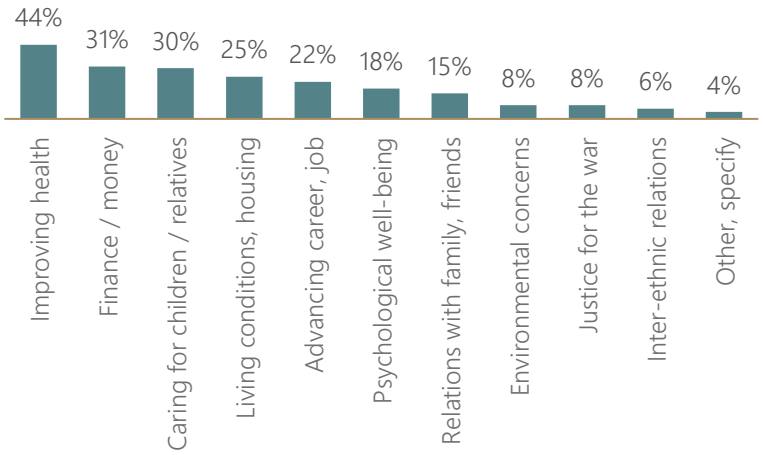
1.1 DAILY NEEDS COME FIRST, BUT JUSTICE AND COHESION MATTER

PRIORITIES

People in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily focused on meeting their everyday needs, including health, poverty, employment, housing, and caring for family. When asked about their personal lives, the top priorities are overwhelmingly practical and immediate: maintaining health (44%), financial stability (31%), caring for children or relatives (30%), living conditions and housing (25%), and advancing career or finding a job (22%). Issues directly related to justice for wartime events (8%) and improving relations with other ethnic groups (6%) are much less commonly mentioned.

Perhaps logically, younger respondents are much more focused on career advancement, mentioned by 48% of those aged 18 to 35 compared to only 3% of those aged 50 and older. Older respondents, by contrast, are more focused on health, mentioned by 58% of those aged 50 and older compared to 26% of those aged 18 to 35. Respondents aged 36 to 49 are also more likely to prioritize caring for children or relatives, at 43%, compared to 22% among those aged 18 to 35.

Figure 2: Personal Priorities (% of respondents) – nationwide survey



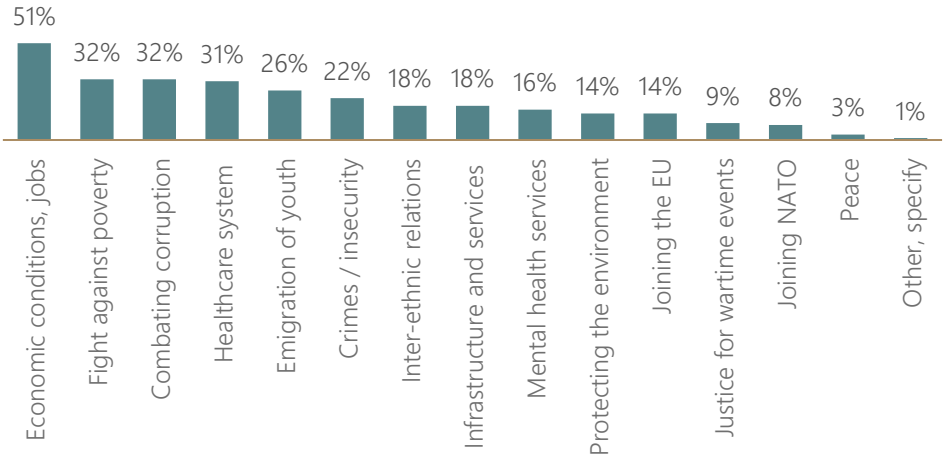
Survey results across municipalities show similar patterns. Practical needs dominate personal priorities across locations, including health, finances, jobs, housing, and caring for family. Improving health ranges from 26% in Bratunac to 59% in Velika Kladuša, while finances reach 52% in Velika Kladuša. In almost all locations, very few respondents mention obtaining justice for war events or improving relations with other ethnic groups as a main concern in their personal lives, often below 10%.

When people consider what the government should focus on, broader social issues become more visible. Economic improvement remains the top priority (51%), followed by the fight against poverty (32%), combating corruption (32%), and the healthcare system (31%). However, supporting reconciliation or better relations between ethnic groups is mentioned by 18% of respondents, and delivering justice for wartime events by 9%. Justice for wartime events is mentioned by 15% of Croat respondents and 11% of Bosniak respondents, but by only 1% of Serb respondents. These

themes still rank below immediate economic and healthcare concerns, but they appear more frequently when framed as collective goals rather than personal priorities.

The municipality surveys show a similar pattern, while also pointing to local variation. Economic issues, jobs, poverty, infrastructure, and health remain the most frequently mentioned areas for government action. However, justice and reconciliation rise more sharply as government priorities in some places. Delivering justice for wartime events reaches 44% in Stolac and 34% in Čapljina, while support for reconciliation reaches 31% in Stolac and 28% in Čapljina. These are substantially higher than personal concern levels for the same topics.

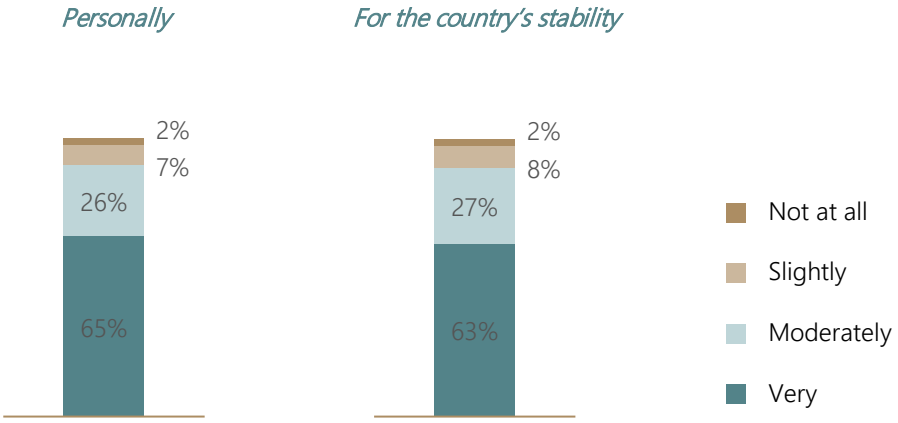
Figure 3: Priorities for the government (% of respondents) – nationwide survey



INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND JUSTICE AS PRIORITIES

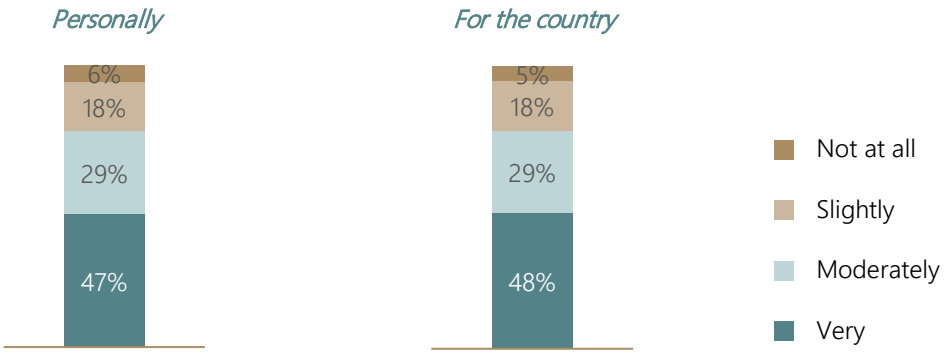
The importance of pursuing justice and improving inter-ethnic relations noted in some municipalities is reflected in broader survey findings. While in most places justice and social cohesion are rarely named as immediate personal priorities, they are frequently seen as important issues requiring continued action. On social cohesion, nearly two thirds of respondents (65%) say it is very important, and 26% moderately important, to continue building better relations between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. When framed in terms of the stability and development of the country, 63% consider such efforts very important and 27% moderately important. Very few respondents consider these efforts only slightly or not at all important. Across municipalities, the sense that improving relations between Bosniak, Serb, and Croat communities remains important both personally and for the country is shared across municipalities as well. Stolac stands out as the only municipality where this sentiment is less extreme, although most respondents still see these efforts as moderately (50%) or very (11%) important for peace and stability.

Figure 4: Perceived importance of continuing efforts to improve relations between Bosniak, Serb and Croat communities – national survey (% of respondents)



Continuing efforts to achieve justice for what happened during the war are considered very important by 47% of respondents personally and by 48% for the country, with another 29% in both cases describing these efforts as moderately important. Very few respondents say such efforts are not important at all, 6% personally and 5% for the country. Locally, however, there is strong variation. In Bratunac and Velika Kladuša, 76% see justice efforts as very important personally, and 84% and 78% respectively see them as very important for the country. Respondents are more divided in Busovača, with about half noting justice as very important (46% personally and 51% nationally). In contrast, fewer than 15% calling justice efforts very important for themselves or the country in Čapljina, Stolac and Goražde.

Figure 5: Importance of continuing efforts to achieve justice for what happened during the war National survey (% of respondents)

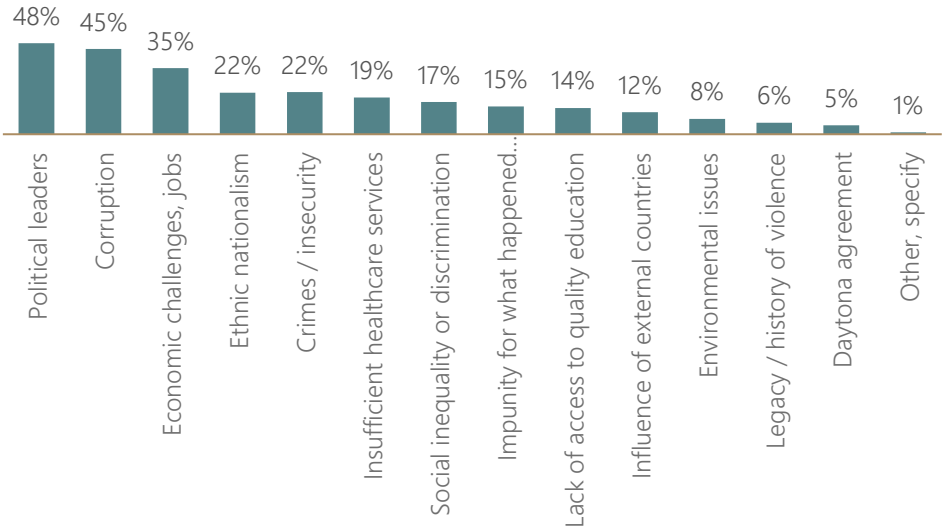


1.2 POLITICS AND CORRUPTION ARE SEEN AS CENTRAL CHALLENGES

ROOT CAUSES OF THE COUNTRY'S CHALLENGES

People across Bosnia and Herzegovina see the country's biggest challenges as rooted in political dysfunction, corruption, and weak economic prospects. When considering the broader problems facing the country today, nearly half of respondents identify political leaders (48%) as one of the main root causes of the country's challenges, with corruption cited by a similarly large proportion (45%). Economic challenges and unemployment follow closely (35%). Ethnic nationalism (22%) and problems of crime or insecurity (22%) are also significant concerns. Other issues, such as insufficient healthcare services (19%), social inequality or discrimination (17%), impunity for what happened during the war (15%), lack of access to quality education (14%), the influence of external countries (12%), environmental issues (8%), the legacy or history of violence (6%), and the Dayton Agreement (5%) are mentioned less. Across ethnic groups, political leaders are consistently identified as a main root cause of the country's problems, with similar levels among Croat (42%), Serb (48%), and Bosniak respondents (49%).

Figure 6: Main root causes of the problems facing the country today (% of respondents) nationwide survey



The municipality surveys reflect the same overall pattern, while also showing local variation in the intensity of concerns. Across municipalities, residents frequently identify corruption and political leadership as primary causes of the problems facing Bosnia and Herzegovina. These concerns are especially high in Velika Kladuša, where corruption is mentioned by 70% and political leaders by 66%, and are also prominent in Busovača. Anxiety about economic challenges or unemployment varies more by location, from only 4% in Bratunac to 44% in Stolac and Velika Kladuša. Views on ethnic nationalism also differ, with only 6% mentioning it in Bratunac compared to a third of residents in Velika Kladuša. Other local problems are more salient in some municipalities, including crime and insecurity, which reach 53% in Velika Kladuša and 39% in Goražde. Social inequality, inadequate education, and insufficient healthcare services are most often highlighted in Stolac and Velika Kladuša.

The challenge of corruption was frequently discussed in focus group discussions. For example, in Brčko, participants highlighted a sense of powerlessness in the face of corruption, describing a system where political and financial interests are so deeply intertwined that ordinary people feel they have little ability to challenge or change it.

"Well, there's not really much that we can personally do to fight against that [corrupt local media and political interests], because here money dominates the most, and most of the money is in politics, so..." (Brčko participant)[15]

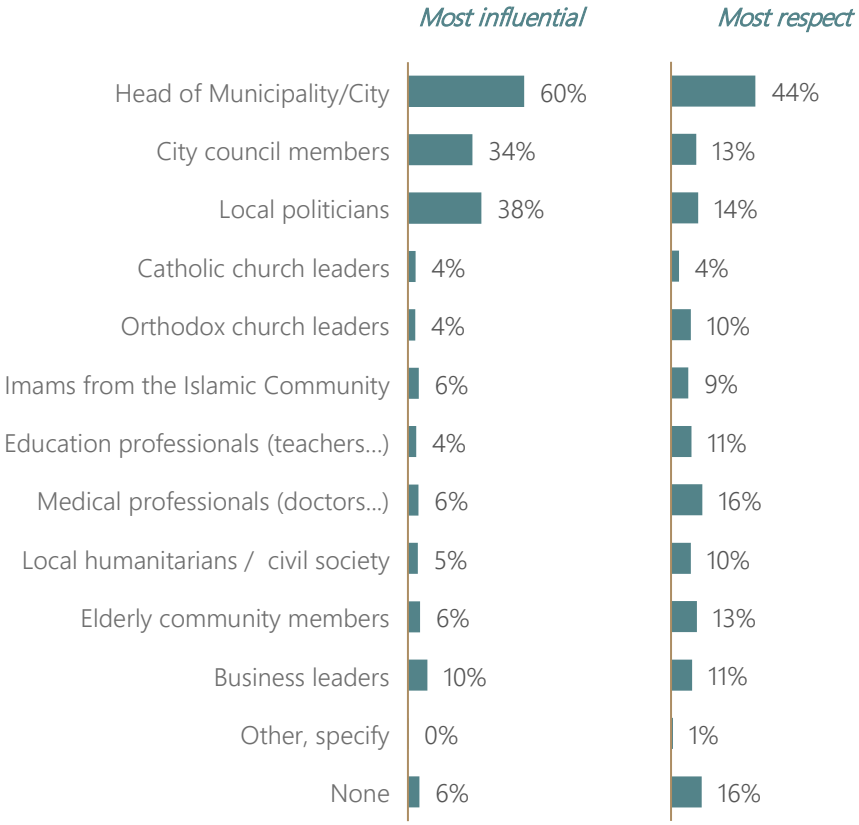
In Stolac, participants highlighted how access to employment and public resources is conditioned on political loyalty, leaving those without the right connections waiting indefinitely and ultimately disappointed.

"...you have to be politically suitable, you have to be close to the municipality and the big shots in the municipality, wait for years, be their servant, fulfill their wishes and their needs, and in the end most people are left with empty promises..." (Stolac participant) [16]

INFLUENCE AND RESPECT

Since politics figures prominently among respondents' concerns, the survey also explores who people see as holding influence in their communities, and whether that influence is accompanied by respect. Nationally, heads of municipalities and cities are viewed as the most influential local actors, with 60% of respondents identifying them as key decision makers. They also receive the highest level of respect, although at a lower rate (44%), suggesting that influence does not always fully translate into respect. Other local political actors are also recognized as influential, including city council members (34%) and local politicians (38%), but far fewer respondents describe them as respected in their communities (13% and 14%, respectively). By comparison, medical professionals are mentioned as respected by 16%, elderly community members by 13%, education professionals and business leaders by 11%, and local humanitarians or civil society representatives by 10%.

Figure 7: Actors with most influence and respect in municipality - National survey (% of respondents)



Perceptions of respected and influential actors also differ by ethnicity. Bosniak respondents are more likely to say the head of municipality or city is respected (51%) and influential (66%), while Croat respondents more often identify city council members, local politicians, religious leaders, educators, medical professionals, and civil society representatives as respected or influential. Serb respondents are more likely than others to say that nobody specific has respect in their municipality (35%).

The municipality level data show both a similar pattern and important variation. Heads of municipalities are seen as especially influential in Rogatica (83%), Goražde (68%), Velika Kladuša (63%), and Busovača (64%). In other communities, influence is distributed differently. In Stolac and Čapljina, city council members are seen as even more influential, by 86% in Stolac and 67% in Čapljina. In Prijedor, half of respondents identify local politicians rather than formal leaders as the most influential actors.

Data on respect are more varied. Heads of municipalities are most respected in several locations, including Velika Kladuša (56%) and Busovača (47%). In Stolac and Čapljina, city council members and other local politicians receive substantial respect. In places such as Prijedor, Busovača, and Velika Kladuša, medical professionals are among the most respected figures. Rogatica stands out for the highest proportion of residents, 62%, who say no group or individuals receive their respect.

RESULTS

2. SOCIAL COHESION

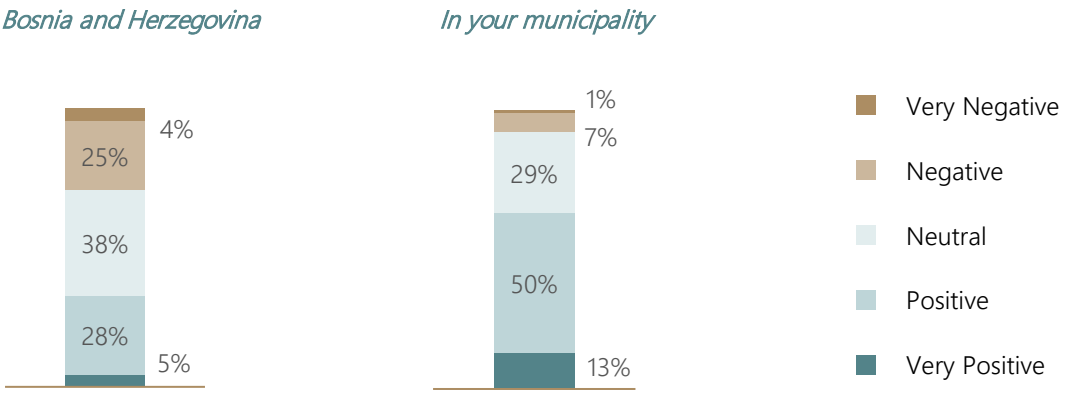
2.1 SLOW PROGRESS BUT HIGH DEMAND FOR IMPROVED INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

STATE OF INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Most people in Bosnia and Herzegovina feel ambivalent about the overall state of interethnic relations but are more positive when thinking about relations in their own municipality. At the national level, only a small proportion rate interethnic relations as very positive (5%), and just over a quarter describe them as positive (28%). The largest share describes relations as neutral (38%), while about a quarter view them as negative (25%) and 4% as very negative. This distribution reflects a sense of uncertainty and highlights ongoing challenges in building trust and cooperation across ethnic lines. Across demographic groups, differences are small; however, Serb respondents are somewhat more likely to describe inter-ethnic relations at the national level as positive or very positive (40%), compared to Bosniak respondents (29%) and Croat respondents (27%).

Perceptions of inter-ethnic relations are more favorable when respondents assess relations in their own municipality. A majority rate the situation as positive (50%) or very positive (13%), while 29% are neutral, and only a small minority see relations as negative (7%) or very negative (1%). The difference between national and local perceptions may reflect greater familiarity with neighbors and everyday cooperation, as well as political tensions at the national level. The more positive assessment of local relations is strongest among Bosniak and Serb respondents. A combined 69% of Bosniak respondents and 61% of Serb respondents describe relations in their municipality as positive or very positive, compared to 42% of Croat respondents.

Figure 8: Perception of inter-ethnic relations – national survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show a similar distinction between national and local perceptions but also point to important local differences. Across the municipalities surveyed, views of interethnic relations at the national level mirror the nationwide pattern of ambivalence, with about one in four participants expressing positive views, and similar percentages expressing negative views. In most municipalities, the largest share of respondents has a neutral opinion. However, views are most frequently negative in Bratunac, where 40% describe relations as negative or very negative, and in Prijedor, where 51% do so. As in the national survey, assessments are generally more positive when respondents describe interethnic relations in their own communities.

The focus groups further show a more nuanced reality. While participants did not describe everyday coexistence as absent, they repeatedly pointed to moments and spaces where identity, politics, language, or the legacy of war

become more visible and raise inter-ethnic tensions. In Brčko, participants describe the current state of interethnic relations as stable and largely peaceful.

> *"In my group of friends, I don't really pay attention to that division, and even in school, it doesn't matter to me as much as in some other towns where it's really pronounced." (Brčko participant)*[17]

But some participants stressed that tensions tend to flare in connection with specific events or political debates, suggesting that underlying sensitivities remain present even if daily life appears harmonious.

> *"There are certain dates when we… we know every year that tensions will rise. Especially around New Year and Christmas, and also during Bajram. Every time there is always a period when tensions increase, and it gets promoted in the media."*[18]

In Prijedor, the perception is similarly generally positive on a personal level although respondents acknowledged that nationalist graffiti or divisive rhetoric may occasionally appear. Some participants noted a persisting sense of insecurity and loss of trust in institutions, which contributes to feelings of stagnation and encourages many young people to consider leaving the area.

The situation was more complex in Stolac, where participants acknowledged that relations between Croats and Bosniaks are still marked by visible separation and cautious interaction. Institutional legacies, such as the existence of "two schools under one roof," reinforce this sense of division.

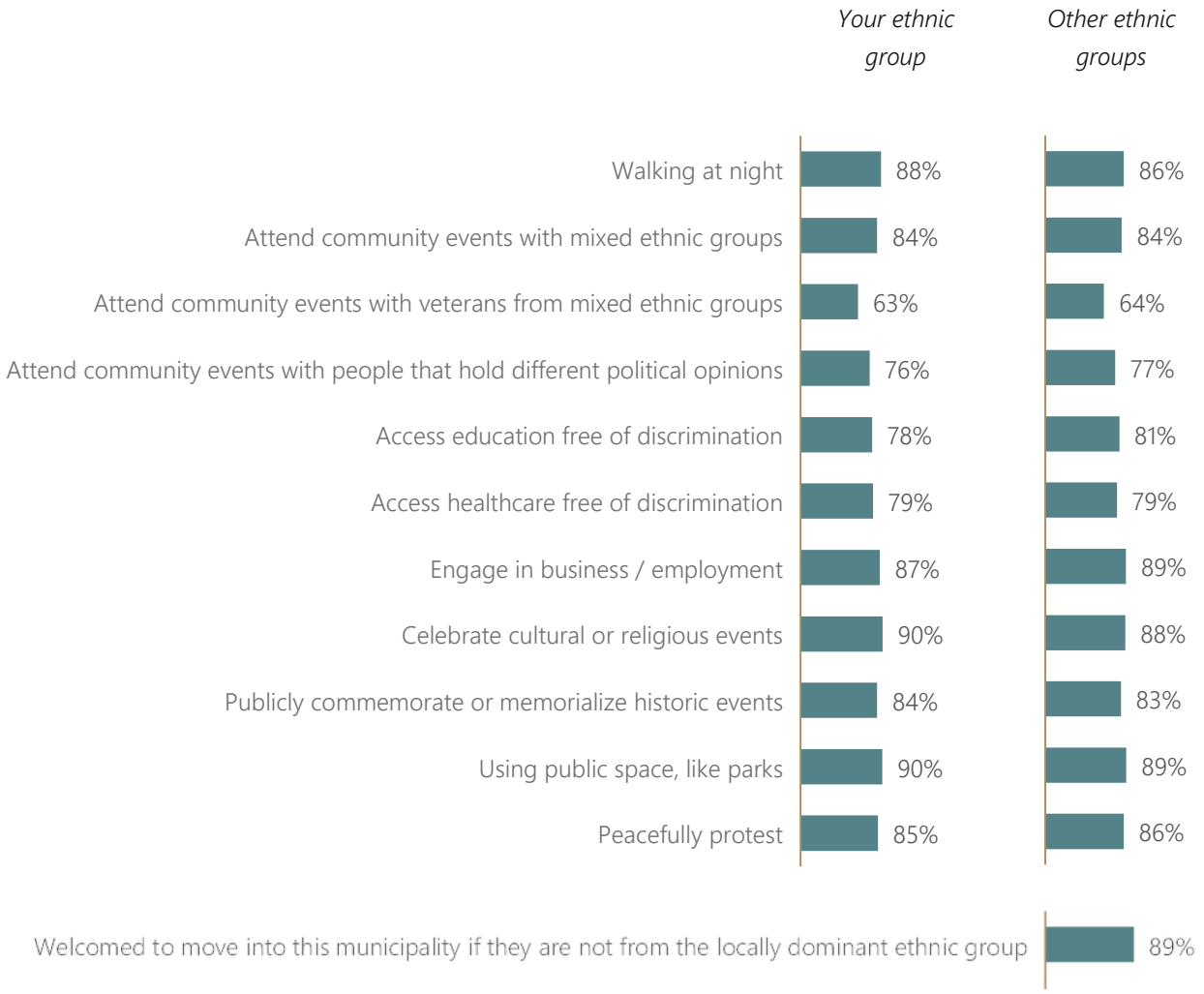
> "Well, I'm 20 years old now, so I don't really know what the situation in Stolac was like 10 years ago, but I know that right now it's tense and not good at all. For the most part, no one wants to express their opinion, because now you know what someone thinks of you" *(Stolac participant)*[19]

EVERYDAY FREEDOM AND SAFETY

The more positive perception of inter-ethnic relations at the local level is also reflected in the perception that people of all ethnic groups can engage in a range of daily life activities at the local level, freely and without fear. For nearly all aspects of daily life, such as walking at night, attending mixed community events, accessing education and healthcare, business opportunities, public celebrations, using public spaces, and peaceful protest, more than 80% believe both their own group and other ethnic groups can participate freely and without fear. A notable exception is participation in community events with veterans from mixed ethnic groups, where confidence is lower for both the respondent's own group (63%) and other ethnic groups (64%). This remains a sensitive area. In line with these findings, 89% of respondents say that people who are not from the locally dominant ethnic group are welcome to move into their municipality, while 11% say they are not welcomed.

Croat respondents are consistently less likely than Serb and Bosniak respondents to say that people from their own ethnic group can engage freely and without fear in daily activities, including accessing education free of discrimination (61% compared to 93% among Serbs and 74% among Bosniaks), accessing healthcare (63% compared to 94% and 75%), engaging in business or employment (60% compared to 92% and 89%), and peacefully protesting (59% compared to 87% and 89%). Croat respondents are also less likely to believe that people from outside the locally dominant ethnic group are welcomed into the municipality (69%, compared to 92% of Serbs and 91% of Bosniaks).

Figure 9: Belief that people from respondent's ethnic group / other ethnic groups can do the following freely / without fear – national survey (% yes)



The municipality surveys again show that these experiences vary by location. In Bratunac, Prijedor, Busovača, and Velika Kladuša, most respondents report that people feel safe and free to take part in daily and community activities, regardless of ethnic group. In Čapljina and Stolac, respondents are much less likely to say that people are safe and free, especially when it comes to ethnic mixing or public events. Goražde falls between these patterns, with better results than Čapljina and Stolac but still some concerns. Rogatica is also mixed, with respondents reporting safety for basic activities but greater concern about joining events with veterans or people holding different political views. Across municipalities, attending war related or political events is where people feel least free.

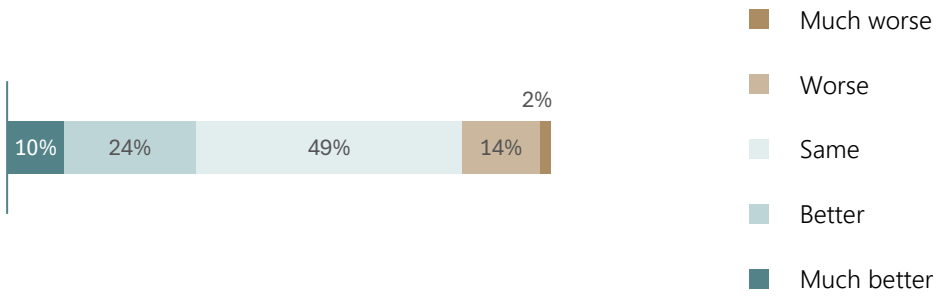
The same local differences appear in views of whether municipalities welcome people from outside the dominant ethnic group. In Bratunac (98%), Busovača (86%), Prijedor (79%), and Velika Kladuša (79%), most respondents believe outsiders are welcomed. In Rogatica (57%), Goražde (52%), Stolac (39%), and especially Čapljina (21%), fewer respondents say this is the case. In Čapljina, 79% say newcomers from other ethnic groups are not welcome, and in Stolac, 61% say the same.

PROGRESS TO DATE AND CONTINUED EFFORTS

The previous findings suggest relatively positive inter-ethnic relations at the local levels, although unevenly distributed according to the cities survey, and higher levels of concerns for relations at the national level. A more concerning trend is the sense that progress in improving inter-ethnic relations has been limited. Nationally, one third of respondents (34%) report that interethnic relations in their municipality have improved over the last 10 years, while about half (49%) say they have stayed the same and 16% say they have worsened. Bosniak respondents are more likely to report a worsening of relations compared to others (19% compared to 9% among Croats and Serbs).

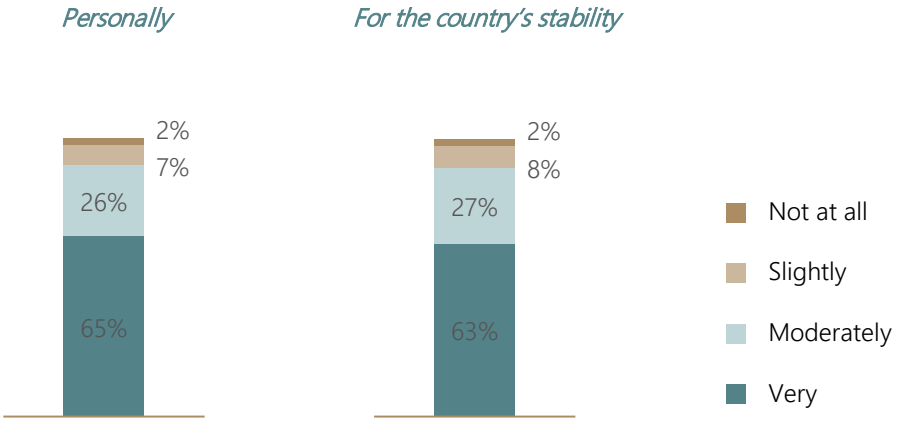
At the municipality level, most respondents also report that interethnic relations have stayed the same over the last 10 years, reflecting limited progress. However, Bratunac and Prijedor stand out as localities where perceptions are more negative. In Bratunac, 51% report that relations have worsened, while 38% say the same in Prijedor. These are also the municipalities where respondents were least positive about the current state of interethnic relations. The results suggest that while local coexistence is often viewed more positively than national relations, progress remains uneven, and some communities continue to show signs of deeper tension and distrust.

Figure 10: Improvement in inter-ethnic relations compared to 10 years ago – national survey (% of respondents)



The lack of perceived progress may explain why most participants expressed strong support for continued efforts to improve these relations further, as noted in section 1.1. At the personal level, nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) consider it very important to keep building better relations between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, while roughly a quarter (26%) view it as moderately important. Only a small minority consider such efforts to be only slightly (7%) or not at all (2%) important. This consensus remains strong when the question is framed considering the country's overall stability and development. Here, 63% consider further reconciliation efforts very important for the country, and 27% as moderately important. Very few respondents are dismissive or skeptical, with only 8% in total selecting "slightly" or "not at all" important. Support for continued efforts to improve relations is high across all groups, but less intense among Croat respondents. At the personal level, 45% of Croat respondents consider such efforts very important, compared to 66% of Serb and 68% of Bosniak respondents.

*Figure 11: Perceived importance of continuing efforts to improve relations between Bosniak, Serb and Croat communities – national survey (% of respondents)**



* *Data presented is section 1.1 is repeated here in association with perceived limited progress in improving inter-ethnic relations.*

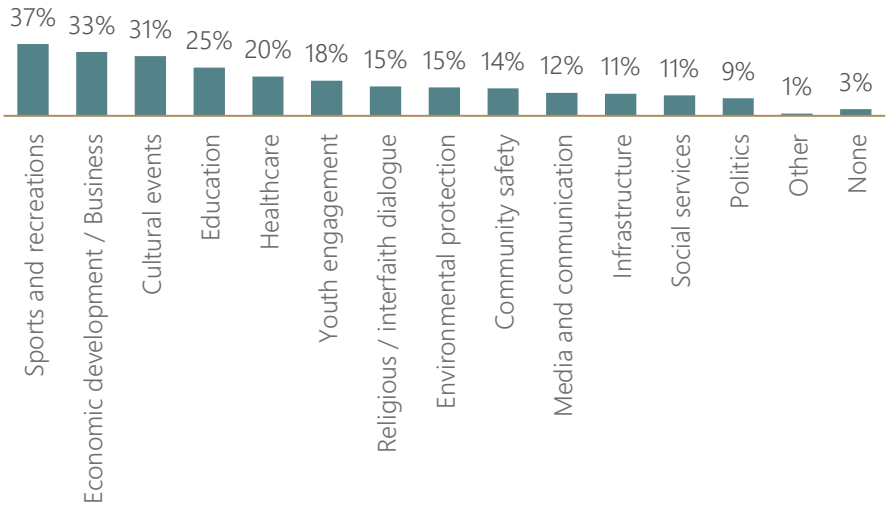
Across municipalities, the importance of continued efforts is also widely recognized. In all but one location, a clear majority consider these efforts very important. Stolac stands out as the only municipality where this sentiment is less extreme, although most respondents still see these efforts as moderately (50%) or very (11%) important for peace and stability. This suggests that, despite differences in local experience, there is broad agreement that improving relations remains important both personally and for the country's future.

2.2 COEXISTENCE EXISTS, BUT DEEPER ENGAGEMENT REMAINS LIMITED

DOMAINS OF POSITIVE INTER-ETHNIC ENGAGEMENT

Survey respondents identify a range of everyday, practical, and community oriented domains where they see positive inter-ethnic relations. However, no single domain or activity stands out as an especially strong or widespread example of positive inter-ethnic relations. Sports and recreation are mentioned most often (37%), followed by economic development and business (33%), cultural events (31%), and education (25%). Fewer respondents mention healthcare (20%), youth engagement (18%), environmental protection (15%), or religious and interfaith dialogue (15%). Politics is seen as a positive domain for inter-ethnic relations by only 9%, reflecting much less optimism about this sphere. Just 3% of respondents say they see no domain where inter-ethnic relations are positive. Younger respondents are more likely to see sports and recreation as a positive domain, mentioned by 48% of those aged 18 to 35 compared to 28% of those aged 50 and older.

Figure 12: Activities or domain with positive inter-ethnic engagement – national survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show that the settings associated with positive inter-ethnic engagement vary widely by location. Economic development and business stand out most clearly in Bratunac (55%) and Prijedor (43%), while sports and recreation are dominant in Busovača (49%) and Velika Kladuša (41%). Cultural events are especially valued in Čapljina (36%), Stolac (26%), and Velika Kladuša (37%), while healthcare is most often mentioned in Stolac (38%), Čapljina (27%), and Goražde (22%). Environmental protection is highlighted in Stolac (44%) and Čapljina (32%). In Rogatica, however, a quarter of respondents (25%) do not identify any domain where inter-ethnic relations are positive.

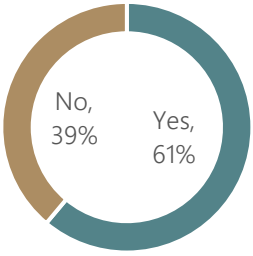
Focus group discussions similarly pointed to sports, culture, education, business, and civil society initiatives as spaces where inter-ethnic cooperation can take place. In Brčko, young people highlighted the role of civil society organizations, sports clubs, and schools in promoting cooperation and dialogue. In Prijedor, workplaces, cultural

events, and sports were described as important spaces for everyday cooperation. In Stolac, sports and agriculture were described as rare but meaningful areas where Croats and Bosniaks work and socialize together.

SPACES FOR SOCIALIZATION

More generally, 61% of respondents report that there are places in their community where people of different ethnic backgrounds can meet and socialize, while 39% say such places do not exist. The existence of such spaces varies sharply across municipalities. Bratunac and Prijedor stand out with the highest proportions of respondents saying that places for people from different ethnic backgrounds to meet and socialize exist, at 84% and 71% respectively. In Busovača, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša, about 40% to 57% report having such spaces, suggesting a more mixed reality. In contrast, Rogatica and Goražde show the greatest social separation, with only 3% and 14% respectively saying diverse meeting places exist. Čapljina also reports a low rate at 29%.

Figure 13: Presence of places in the community for inter-ethnic socialization – national survey (% yes / no)



Despite the presence of some shared spaces, actual participation in inter-ethnic activities remains limited. Only 12% of respondents say they often participate in activities outside work that include people from different ethnic groups, while 34% participate sometimes, 24% rarely, and 30% never participate. Participation in community events follows a similar pattern: 12% participate often, 31% sometimes, 30% rarely, and 27% never.

Figure 14: Frequency of participation in activities or community events that include people from different ethnic groups, outside of work– national survey (% of respondents)

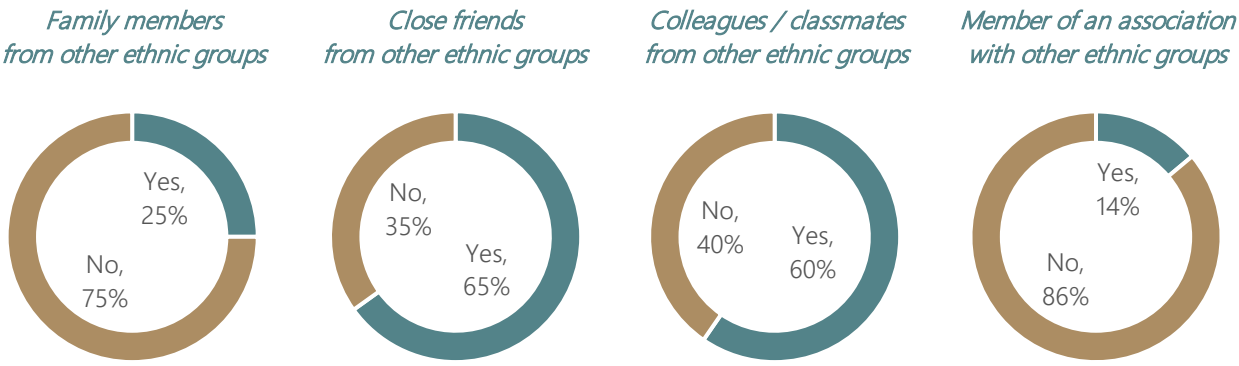


The municipality surveys again show uneven patterns. Bratunac reports the highest level of engagement, with 37% saying they often participate in inter-ethnic activities both outside work and in community events. Regular participation is much lower in Rogatica, Goražde, and Stolac, where only 1% to 6% often participate and large shares

say they never do so, reaching 74% in Rogatica. Busovača and Velika Kladuša show more moderate engagement, with 16% to 19% participating often and around a third joining sometimes.

Inter-ethnic connections are more common in social networks than in organized associations. Nationally, 65% of respondents say they have close friends from other ethnic groups, and 60% say they have colleagues or classmates from other ethnic groups. However, only 25% report having family members from other ethnic groups, pointing to more limited inter-ethnic ties within families. Membership in associations with ethnically diverse backgrounds is low, at 14%. Among those involved, the most common types of organizations are sports or recreational groups (30%), civil organizations (23%), and humanitarian organizations (14%).

Figure 15: Extent of inter-ethnic connections – national survey (% yes / no)



Municipality data show strong variation. Social networks across ethnic lines are strongest in Bratunac and Busovača, where over 80% report having close friends and colleagues from other groups. They are weakest in Čapljina and Stolac, where only 22% to 31% have such friends. Membership in ethnically diverse associations also varies widely, from 0% in Rogatica to 39% in Bratunac. The nature of these associations also differs. In Bratunac, women's organizations are common (91%), while sports associations are most notable in Prijedor (60%), and civil organizations dominate in Rogatica (67%).

WILLINNESS TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE TOPICS

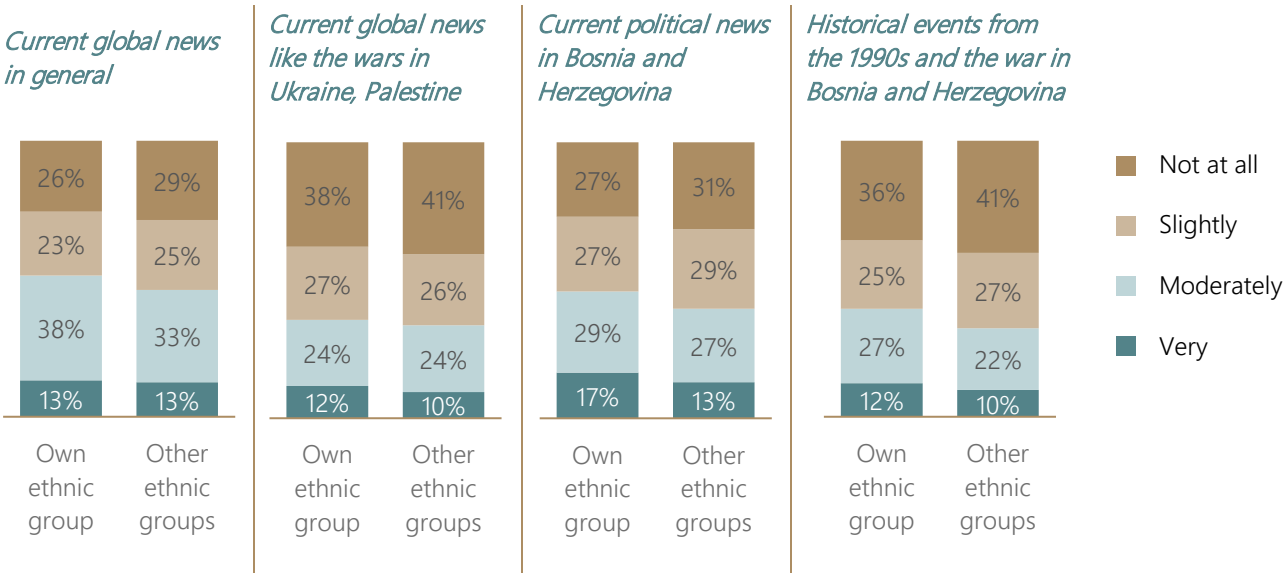
Beyond participation in shared activities, another important dimension of inter-ethnic relations is willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue, particularly on politically or historically sensitive topics. At the national level, willingness to discuss sensitive topics is generally higher within respondents' own ethnic group than with people from other groups, although the difference is generally small. This is likely to reflect broader social unease beyond inter-ethnic dynamics. For current global news, similar proportions say they are very or moderately willing to engage in discussion within their own group (51%) and with people from other ethnic groups (46%). However, willingness drops when the topic becomes more sensitive.

For current global conflicts, 36% are very or moderately willing to discuss the topic with their own group, compared to 34% with members of other ethnic groups. For historical events from the 1990s and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 39% are very or moderately willing to discuss these issues with their own group, compared to 32% with other groups. Across all topics, a greater share say they are not willing at all to engage with people from other ethnic backgrounds, reaching 41% for both foreign conflicts and wartime history.

Serb respondents are generally the least willing to discuss sensitive topics with people from other ethnic groups. For example, 54% of Serb respondents say they are not at all willing to discuss historical events from the 1990s and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina with members of other ethnic groups, compared to 35% of Bosniak respondents and

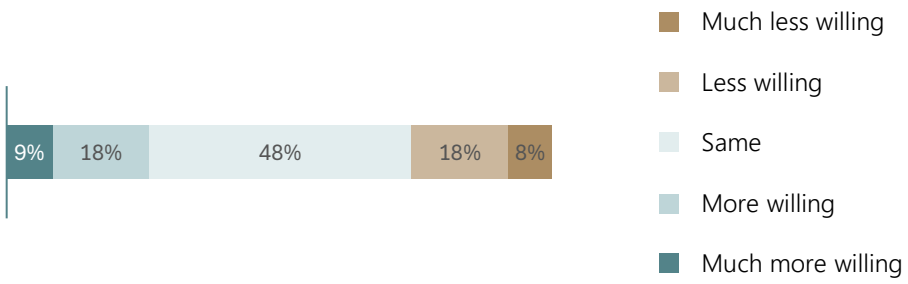
26% of Croat respondents. Serb respondents are also more likely to be unwilling to discuss current political news in Bosnia and Herzegovina with members of other groups (44%, compared to 25% among Croats and Bosniaks).

Figure 16: Willingness to engage in conversation about selected topics with persons from own / other ethnic groups – national survey (% of respondents)



Additionally, nearly half of respondents (48%) say their willingness to discuss sensitive topics has not changed over the past ten years. A combined 27% say they are more willing or much more willing to have these discussions now, while 26% say they are less willing or much less willing. This is consistent with the broader finding that many respondents see limited progress in inter-ethnic relations over the same period.

Figure 17: Overall willingness to engage in conversation over sensitive topics, compared to 10 years ago – national survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings show marked contrasts. In Bratunac and Velika Kladuša, residents show higher willingness to engage in discussions, whether inside or outside their own group. In Bratunac, 44% are very willing to discuss current global news with both their own and other groups, while in Velika Kladuša, over 20% express strong openness on most topics. By contrast, Rogatica and Goražde stand out for reluctance, with more than 70% saying they are not at all willing to discuss sensitive issues such as global conflicts, national politics, and wartime history, especially with members of other ethnic groups. In most municipalities, willingness drops when discussions involve people from other ethnic groups, especially for topics such as the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where rates of complete unwillingness climb above 80% in Rogatica and Goražde.

Changes over time also vary across municipalities. Bratunac and Velika Kladuša most frequently report positive change, with 47% and 38% respectively saying they are more or much more willing to discuss sensitive topics now. In Čapljina, 26% feel more willing, while 51% say their willingness has stayed the same. The status quo dominates in Prijedor, Busovača, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša, where about half report no change. Rogatica and Goražde show the most negative shifts, with over 40% in both saying they are now less or much less willing, including 32% in Goražde who say they are much less willing.

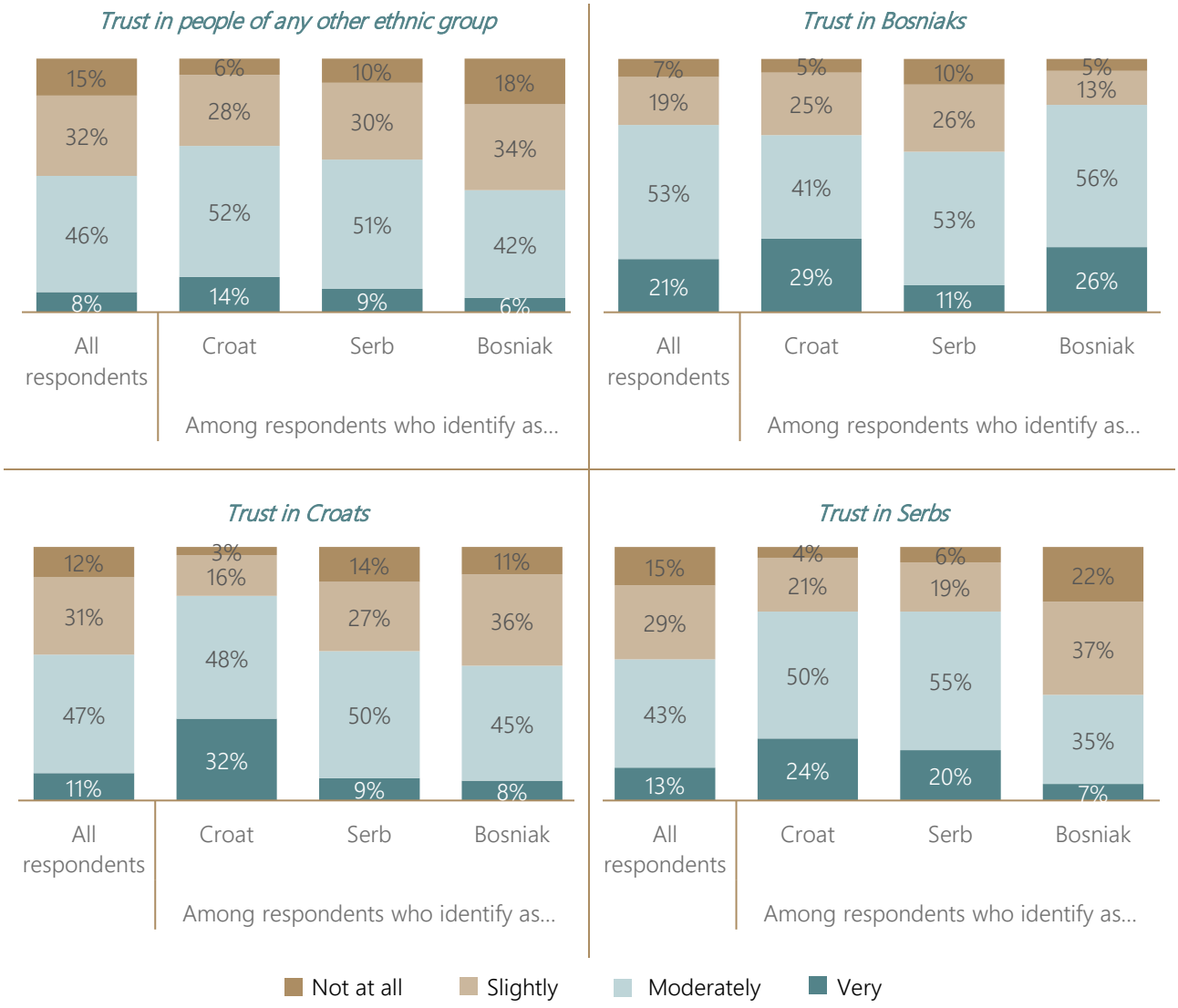
TRUST AND INCLUSION

The lack of regular engagement and reluctance to discuss sensitive issues may be related to relatively low unconditional inter-ethnic trust, acknowledging other social dynamics that undermine relations even within ethnic groups. Trust in people from other ethnic groups is generally moderate, with 46% expressing a moderate level of trust and only 8% reporting very high trust. In contrast, 32% trust people from other groups only slightly, and 15% report having no trust at all.

When considering trust across specific groups, respondents from all three major ethnic groups express the highest level of trust toward their own community, while trust in members of other ethnic groups is consistently lower. Among Bosniak respondents, 82% express very or moderate trust in other Bosniaks, but this drops to 53% for Croats and 42% for Serbs. Among Croat respondents, 81% report very or moderate trust toward Croats, compared to 70% for Bosniaks and 74% for Serbs. Among Serb respondents, 75% trust other Serbs, while 63% trust Bosniaks and 59% trust Croats.

Municipality data show that trust varies considerably across local contexts. Municipalities with more mixed populations and significant return of minorities, such as Bratunac, Busovača, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša, tend to report higher levels of trust toward other groups. In contrast, places such as Rogatica and Goražde, which remain highly mono-ethnic, show much lower trust in out-groups. Trust in people from other ethnic backgrounds is above 50% in most municipalities, but drops sharply in Goražde and Rogatica, where only 35% and 6% respectively say they trust people from other backgrounds.

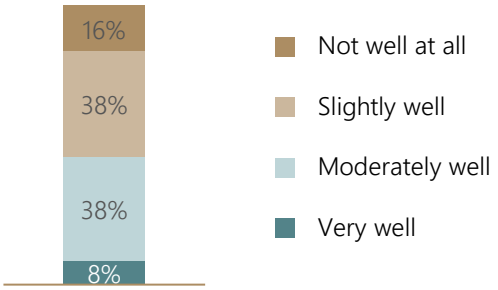
Figure 18: Overall trust in other ethnic groups – national survey (% of respondents)



VETERANS INCLUSION

Barriers to full social inclusion are also reflected in perceptions of how well veterans from all ethnic backgrounds are integrated into municipal life. Nationally, only 8% say veterans are included very well. The majority rate inclusion more modestly, with 38% saying moderately well and another 38% saying only slightly well. A further 16% say veterans from different ethnic backgrounds are not included at all. These numbers show that while some level of inclusion exists, many believe that veterans still face barriers to truly feeling part of the community.

Figure 19: Perceived participation and inclusion of veterans from all ethnic within respondents' community – national survey (% of respondents)



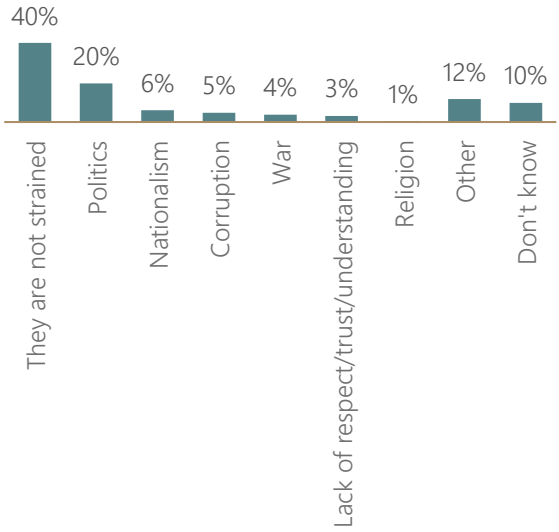
Strong integration of veterans across ethnic lines is rare at the municipal level. In Čapljina, 50% believe veterans are moderately well integrated, while in Bratunac and Busovača, over half say that integration is only slight, at 51% and 48% respectively. In Rogatica, 39% think veterans from all groups are not integrated at all, and in Goražde, that view is shared by 28%. In Čapljina and Stolac, outright exclusion is seen by fewer people, at 4% and 8%.

2.3 DIVISIVE POLITICS, WAR LEGACIES AND EDUCATION LIMIT PROGRESS

FACTORS STRAINING INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

The results discussed in the previous sections show that most respondents regard improved inter-ethnic relations as important for their well-being and the country's stability, while also acknowledging slow and uneven progress. When asked why inter-ethnic relations in their municipality remain strained, the most common explanations point to politics and nationalism. Positively, four in ten respondents (40%) say that inter-ethnic relations in their municipality are not strained at all. One in five respondents (20%) attribute ongoing tension to political factors, while 6% specifically cite nationalism. Another 12% choose "other," suggesting that local circumstances or less common issues may also be at play. Smaller shares mention corruption (5%), the legacy of war (4%), lack of respect or trust (3%), or religion (1%) as sources of tension. At the same time, 10% say they "do not know," highlighting both the complexity of the issue and the possibility that strained relations have become normalized in some communities. Only 18% of Croat respondents say relations are ***not*** strained, compared to 46% of Serb and 41% of Bosniak respondents.

Figure 20: Factors straining inter-ethnic relations in the community national survey (% of respondents)



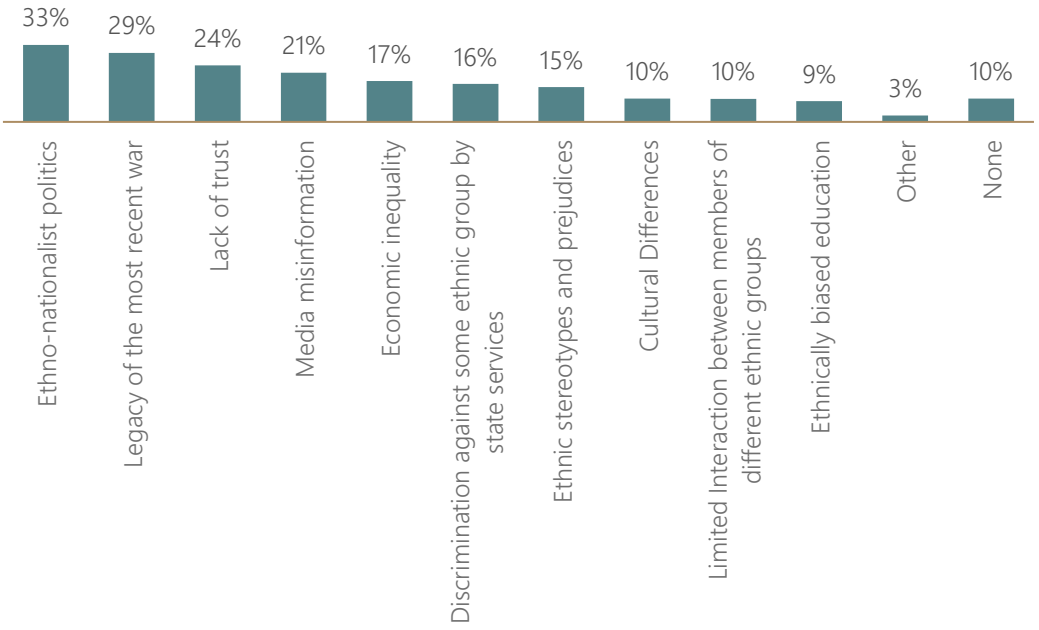
The municipality surveys show that perceptions of strain vary considerably by location. The most common response in Rogatica (50%), Prijedor (41%), Goražde (41%), and Velika Kladuša (38%) is that inter-ethnic relations are not strained at all. Where tensions are noted, politics is most frequently mentioned, especially in Bratunac (36%) and Prijedor (35%), followed by nationalism, typically cited by 5% to 7% of respondents. In some places, other factors are more prominent, including the legacy of war in Bratunac (15%) and corruption in Čapljina (26%) and Stolac (22%).

Focus group participants also linked slow progress in inter-ethnic relations to politics, media, schools, and broader institutional practices. One Brčko participant summarized this perception directly: "Right now, honestly, maybe the situation is even worse than it was. But I don't know, whether the schools, politicians, or the media are to blame — in my view, they are all equally to blame." (Brčko participant)[20]

BARRIERS TO IMPROVING RELATIONS

When asked more generally about barriers to improving inter-ethnic relations, respondents identify a wider range of obstacles. A third of respondents (33%) see ethno-nationalist politics as a significant barrier, while a similar proportion (29%) identify the legacy of the most recent war. Lack of trust is cited by 24%, media misinformation by 21%, economic inequality by 17%, discrimination by state services by 16%, ethnic stereotypes and prejudices by 15%, and cultural differences by 10%. These findings suggest that respondents do not see strained relations as the result of a single issue, but as connected to political, social, economic, and historical factors. Croat respondents are more likely to cite the legacy of the most recent war (40%), lack of trust (39%), economic inequality (33%), cultural differences (29%), media misinformation (30%), and discrimination by state services (27%). Bosniak respondents most often emphasize ethno-nationalist politics (37%), while Serb respondents are more likely than others to say there are no barriers (15%).

Figure 21: Barriers to improving inter-ethnic relations in the municipality national survey (% of respondents)



Across municipalities, the same barriers appear, but with different intensity. The legacy of the most recent war is one of the most frequently cited barriers in Bratunac (36%), Goražde (34%), and Velika Kladuša (36%). Ethno-nationalist politics is a consistent concern, noted by 37% in Prijedor, 39% in Čapljina, 38% in Stolac, and 31% in Velika Kladuša. Lack of trust is highlighted most in Čapljina (38%) and Busovača (36%), while economic inequality is more frequently mentioned in Stolac (41%), Čapljina (34%), and Busovača (31%). Media misinformation is also seen as a significant barrier, especially in Stolac (43%), Čapljina (42%), and Velika Kladuša (43%).

Focus group discussions reflected the same distinction seen throughout the report between relatively functional everyday relations and more divisive political or institutional dynamics. In Brčko and Prijedor, participants described daily interactions at work, in neighborhoods, and in public spaces as generally positive and free of overt ethnic tension. At the same time, participants across sites described politics as a major source of division. As one Brčko participant explained, "*Everything is in some harmony and goes nicely until politicians get involved. Unfortunately, here in Brčko we suffer from the conflict between Banja Luka and Sarajevo.*" (Brčko participant). In Prijedor, a participant similarly argued that political representatives should help bridge communities but often deepen divisions instead: "*…I think that actually the bridge between Serbs and Bosniaks should be those representatives of the authorities. But*

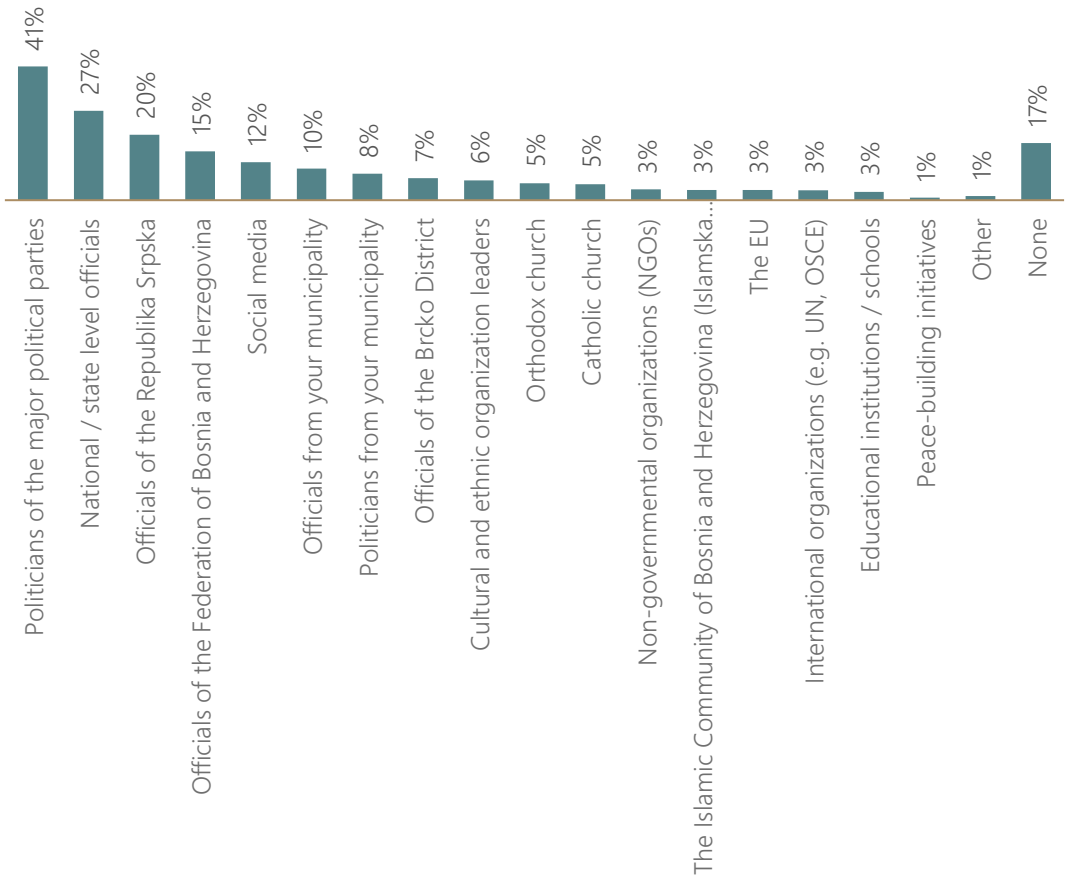
unfortunately, that is used for other purposes, and I think they are precisely the ones who deepen the divisions between people…" (Prijedor participant).[21]

Media were also described as reinforcing divisions. In Brčko, one participant described media outlets as shaped by political and financial interests: "I am of the view that the media, for me, are actually, let's say, the biggest advocates of intolerance, even if that sounds harsh, because it has always been like this — whoever pays them, they report and say what that side demands or likes." (Brčko participant)[22]. In Prijedor, another participant noted that media and social networks can "poison people" and "disrupt all our relations," even where people live, work, and socialize together normally.

ACTORS SEEN AS UNDERMINING RELATIONS

Consistent with findings on politics as a source of strain and a barrier to improving inter-ethnic relations, survey respondents are most likely to identify politicians as playing a negative role in inter-ethnic relations at the municipal level. Politicians from major political parties were mentioned by 41% of respondents, more than any other group. National or state level officials are cited by 27%, officials from Republika Srpska by 20%, and officials from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by 15%. Local political figures are mentioned less often but are still noted as negative influences, including officials from respondents' own municipality (10%) and municipal politicians (8%). Other actors are mentioned less frequently. About one in ten respondents select social media (12%) as playing a divisive role, while smaller shares point to religious institutions, NGOs, schools, and international organizations. Notably, 17% say that no specific groups undermine inter-ethnic relations in their community.

Figure 22: Actors seen as playing a negative role, undermining inter-ethnic relations in respondents' municipality - National survey (% of respondents)



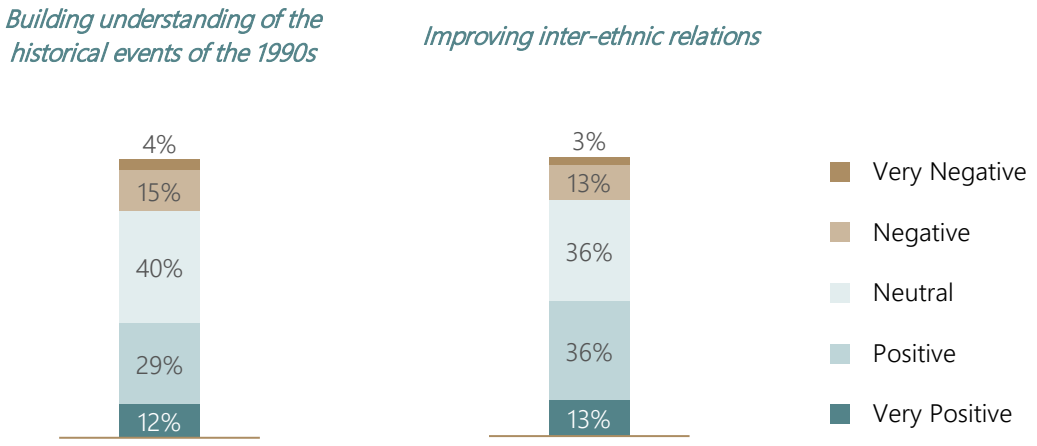
Municipality level responses reflect local power dynamics, governance, and recent history. In Bratunac, 77% point to officials of Republika Srpska as a negative influence, a level far higher than in any other location. In Stolac, officials of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina stand out, with 64% naming them as playing a negative role. Local politics is also prominent. Half of Prijedor respondents select politicians of the major political parties, compared to 36% in Busovača and 31% in Velika Kladuša. In several municipalities, religious institutions and cultural organizations are also seen as undermining inter-ethnic relations, especially in Čapljina, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša, where these actors are cited at rates much higher than the national average. In Rogatica, Busovača, and Velika Kladuša, over a quarter of respondents say "none," meaning they do not see any group as playing a negative role, while in Goražde this view is expressed by 41%.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Against this backdrop, the role of education as a catalyst for positive change remains uncertain. While schools are recognized by some as having a beneficial influence, many people are ambivalent or unconvinced that schools are making a strong contribution to reconciliation and historical understanding. When asked about schools' contribution to fostering mutual understanding and helping young people process the history of the 1990s, assessments are mixed. One in five respondents hold negative (15%) or very negative (4%) opinions, while 12% hold very positive and 29% positive views. The largest share describes this role as neutral (40%). Serb and Bosniak respondents are more likely than Croat respondents to rate the role of schools in improving inter-ethnic relations positively or very positively, at 50% and 51%, compared to 35% among Croat respondents.

A similar pattern is seen regarding the role of schools in improving inter-ethnic relations. Just over one in ten respondents see their impact as very positive (13%), while 36% rate it as positive and another 36% remain neutral. Another 13% view the role of schools as negative, and 3% as very negative. These results suggest that schools are not widely seen as worsening relations, but they are also not consistently viewed as strong drivers of mutual understanding.

Figure 23: Perception of the role of schools in building understanding of the historical events of the 1990s and improving inter-ethnic relations – national survey (% of respondents)



Municipality results show mixed and locally distinct perceptions. In Prijedor and Velika Kladuša, positive ratings are relatively higher: 19% in Prijedor and 16% in Velika Kladuša see schools as very positive in helping young people understand the historical events of the 1990s, with another 32% in Prijedor and 30% in Velika Kladuša giving a positive rating. Busovača also stands out, with 39% rating the role of schools as positive. In contrast, in Bratunac and Stolac,

negative views are more common. In Bratunac, almost half (45%) say the school contribution has been negative and another 12% say it is very negative. Negative perceptions are also fairly high in Goražde and Rogatica.

Views follow a similar pattern when it comes to the role of schools in improving inter-ethnic relations. Positive assessments are highest in Busovača (44% positive, 13% very positive), Prijedor (35% positive, 13% very positive), and Velika Kladuša (36% positive, 19% very positive). Neutral responses are also frequent across municipalities, often exceeding one third of respondents.

Focus group findings provide additional context for these mixed assessments. In Stolac, institutional separation in education was repeatedly described as a barrier to inter-ethnic relations. Participants referred to the continued existence of "two schools under one roof" as reinforcing separation from childhood onward. One Stolac participant described the issue in broader terms: "*So I think it's more about politics and other things preventing [positive relations] from happening – it's pure segregation in society, a totally negative opinion in my view*." (Stolac participant)[23]

Participants also pointed to generational dynamics. Older generations were often described as carrying the most direct consequences of the war, while younger people were sometimes seen as more open to coexistence. At the same time, respondents noted that family upbringing can pass memories, fears, and prejudices on children. As one Prijedor participant put it, "*Upbringing starts from home, that we pass on to our children, that we teach our children to live in a multicultural environment, to value what is ours, to respect what belongs to others, and that is, therefore, the starting point from which we can build relations*." (Prijedor participant)[24]

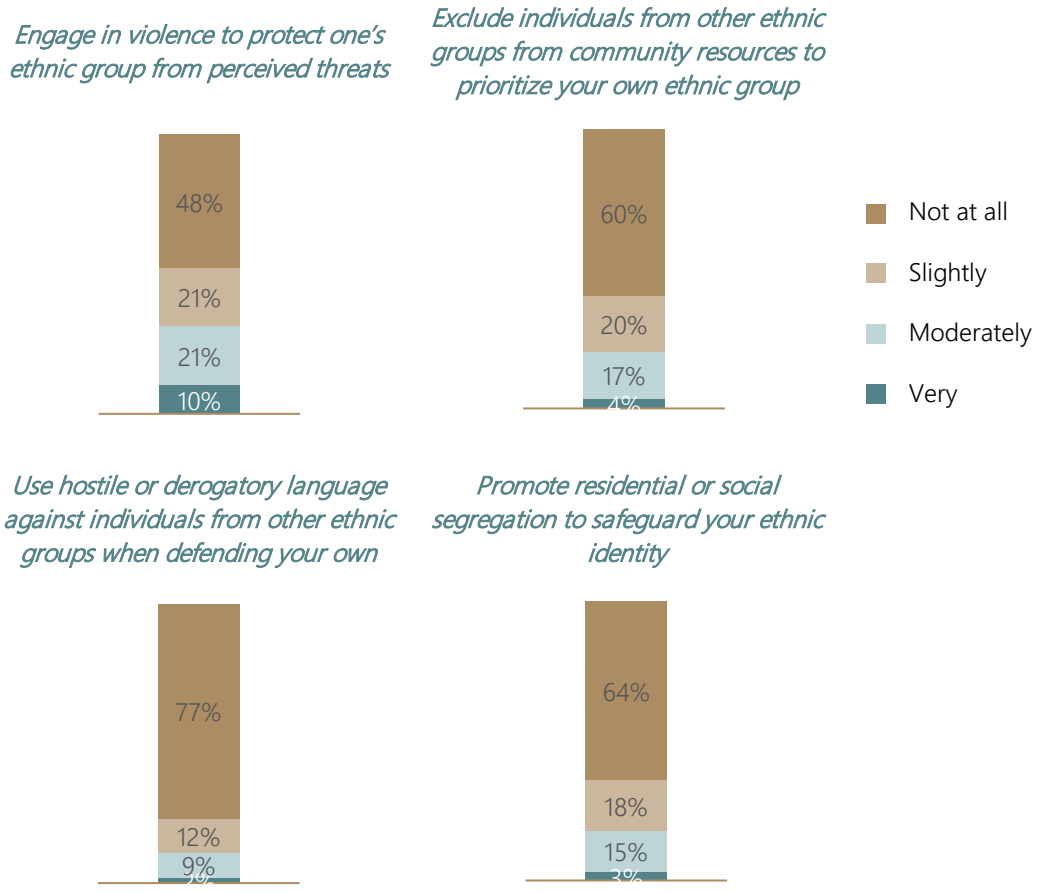
ACCEPTABILITY OF EXCLUSIONARY OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

Perhaps most troubling, attitudes toward exclusionary or aggressive behavior reveal a sizable minority for whom such actions remain at least somewhat acceptable. While the majority reject most aggressive or discriminatory actions against other ethnic groups, many find these behaviors acceptable. Nearly half of respondents (52%) say that violence to protect their ethnic group is at least slightly acceptable. Similarly, 40% think it is at least a little acceptable to exclude other ethnic groups from community resources. Even actions like using hostile language and supporting segregation, which are more widely rejected, are still seen as at least slightly acceptable by 23% and 36% of respondents, respectively.

Municipality findings show substantial differences. In Rogatica, 80% say that engaging in violence to protect their ethnic group is not acceptable at all, and in Prijedor the figure is 63%. Similarly, in Busovača and Velika Kladuša, 64% and 53% reject violence completely. In comparison, only 6% in Čapljina and 17% in Stolac reject violence outright, while large majorities there consider it at least slightly acceptable.

Attitudes toward exclusion show the same pattern. In Rogatica and Prijedor, 81% and 69% say it is not acceptable to exclude other ethnic groups from community resources. In Busovača and Velika Kladuša, the numbers are also high at 76% and 69%. However, in Čapljina and Stolac, only 15% and 9% reject exclusion completely, with most willing to accept it to some extent. When it comes to hostile language, rejection is again strong in some places: 95% in Rogatica and 86% in Busovača say it is not acceptable. In contrast, in Čapljina and Stolac, just 8% and 10% completely reject the use of hostile language, and more than half find it at least a little acceptable. For promoting segregation, 91% in Rogatica and 77% in Prijedor say it is not acceptable at all, while those numbers drop to 9% in Čapljina and Stolac.

Figure 24: Acceptability of inter-ethnic exclusionary or violent behaviors – National survey (% of respondents)



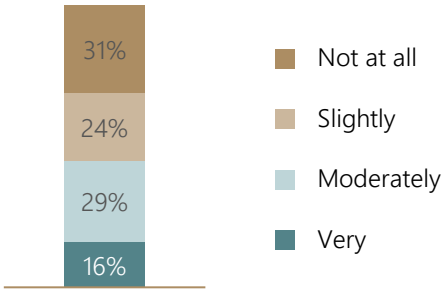
2.4 SUPPORT FOR HIGH STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

AWARENESS AND PERCEIVED IMPACT

There is widespread public concern over individuals accused of wartime crimes holding government jobs, as many fear this undermines trust in institutions and harms inter-ethnic relations. Most people strongly believe that anyone implicated in such serious offenses should not be allowed to serve in public roles, emphasizing the importance of strict standards and accountability in building public confidence and fostering reconciliation.

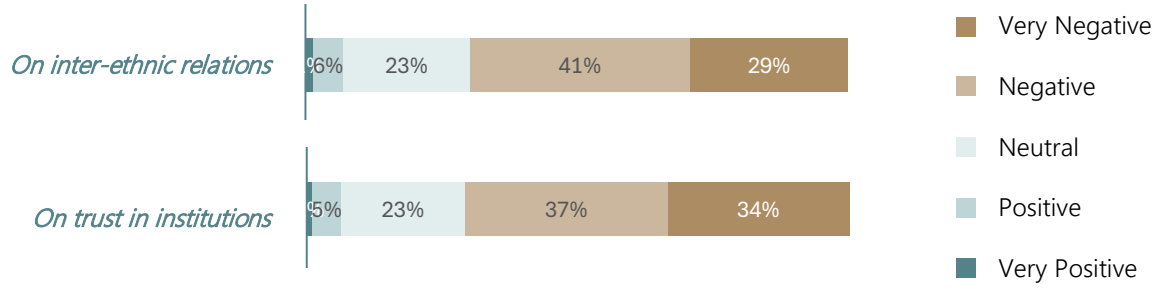
A large portion of respondents are aware of reports that people accused of committing crimes during the war may still be working in administrative roles within the government and public administration. Nationally, 16% say they are very aware of such reports, 29% are moderately aware, and 24% are slightly aware. However, 31% report not being aware at all.

Figure 25: Awareness of reports that individuals accused of committing crimes during the war are still working in administrative roles within the government and public administration – National survey (% of respondents)



There is strong concern about the impact of employing such individuals. As many as 70% believe this would negatively affect inter-ethnic relations, including 41% who say the impact would be negative and 29% who say it would be very negative. Only a small number, 7%, see the impact as positive. Trust in public institutions would also suffer: 71% say their trust would be negatively affected, including 37% who say the impact would be negative and 34% who say it would be very negative. Six percent would view the impact on trust in institutions positively, possibly as a sign of moving beyond the past.

Figure 26: Impact of employment of individuals accused of committing crimes during the war in administrative roles – National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show that awareness and concern vary considerably across local contexts. Awareness that people accused of war crimes still work in government is highest in Bratunac, where 55% say they are very aware, and in Velika Kladuša, where 26% say the same. Awareness is much lower elsewhere, with many respondents either slightly aware or not aware at all. In Prijedor, 44% are not aware at all, and in Goražde, 40% are not aware.

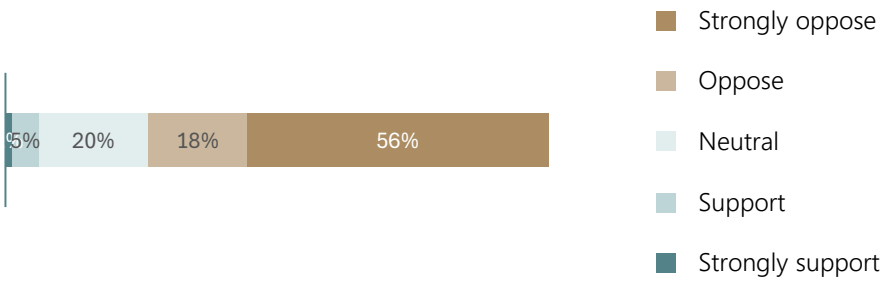
The perceived impact on inter-ethnic relations also differs by municipality. Concern is strongest in Bratunac, where 67% believe this would very negatively affect inter-ethnic relations. Prijedor and Velika Kladuša also show high concern, with 41% and 39% respectively saying the impact would be very negative. By contrast, more respondents in Čapljina (55%) and Stolac (54%) see this situation as neutral for inter-ethnic relations, with very few saying it would be very negative.

The same pattern appears in relation to trust in institutions. Nationally, most respondents believe that employing individuals accused of committing crimes during the war would damage trust in public institutions. At the municipal level, this concern is again strongest in Bratunac, where 74% say trust would be very negatively affected. In places such as Čapljina and Stolac, however, most respondents describe the impact as neutral, 56% in Čapljina and 46% in Stolac, while only 3% and 6% respectively say the impact would be very negative.

SUPPORT FOR STRICT ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

When it comes to policy, most respondents reject the idea of allowing people accused but not convicted of war crimes to serve in public positions. Over half (56%) strongly oppose this, and another 18% oppose it. Only 6% support or strongly support the possibility of such individuals serving in public positions. This clearly shows that the public wants a high standard for eligibility to serve in government positions, especially pertaining to sensitive wartime issues, and views the presence of such individuals as damaging both to inter-ethnic trust and faith in institutions.

Figure 27: Possibility for individuals accused but not convicted of war crimes to serve in public positions – National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings show that opposition is strongest in Bratunac, Velika Kladuša, and Prijedor. In Bratunac, 76% strongly oppose allowing accused but not convicted war crimes suspects to serve in public roles, followed by Velika Kladuša (69%) and Prijedor (56%). In Čapljina and Stolac, opposition is much less intense. Only 2% in Čapljina and 5% in Stolac strongly oppose this, while most respondents are either neutral, 52% and 59% respectively, or supportive, 24% and 11% respectively.

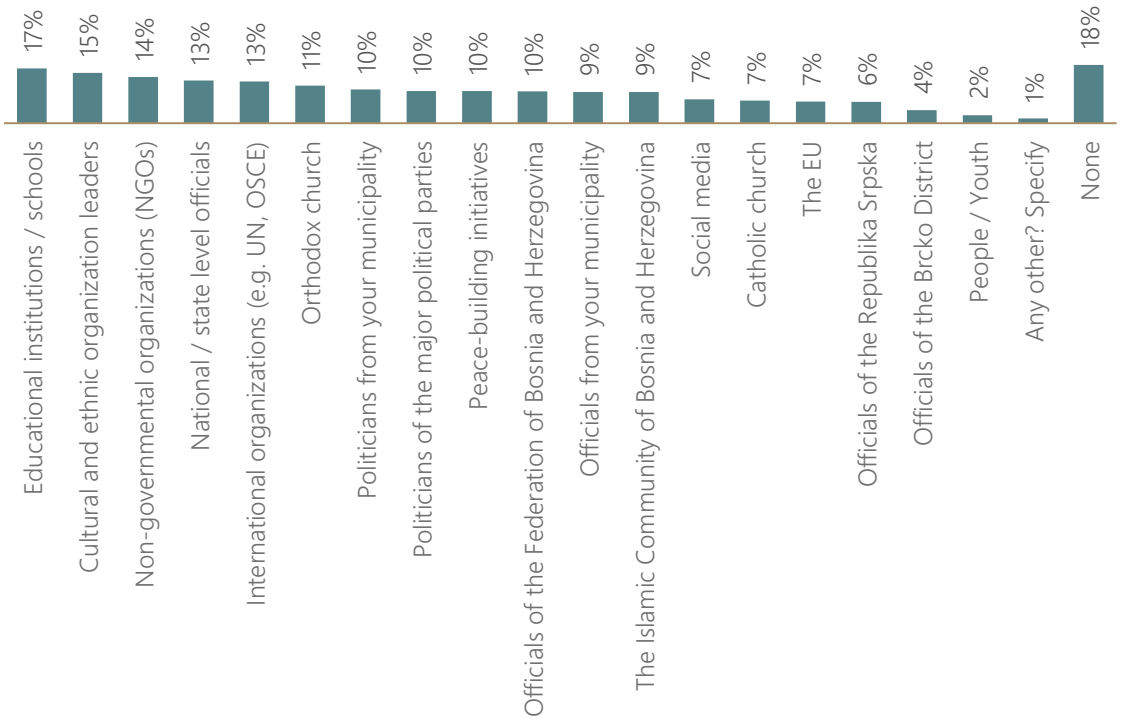
2.5 LIMITED TRUST AND LOW ENGAGEMENT HINDER INTER-ETHNIC EFFORTS

LIMITED POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

As noted in earlier sections, most respondents see improving inter-ethnic relations as important but also describe progress as slow and uneven. They also point to politics, institutions, media, the legacy of war, and low trust as factors that continue to strain relations. These findings are reflected in the limited confidence people express in actors who could lead efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations. Although there is broad support for better relations, no institution or group stands out as widely trusted or recognized as leading positive changes.

When asked which actors, if any, play a leading positive role in improving inter-ethnic relations at the municipal level, no single group stands out. The highest percentage goes to educational institutions and schools, mentioned by 17% of respondents, followed by cultural and ethnic organization leaders (15%) and non-governmental organizations (14%). Several other groups, including national or state officials, international organizations, and political figures, are mentioned by about one in ten respondents, but none exceeds 20%. Notably, 18% say that no actor plays a positive role.

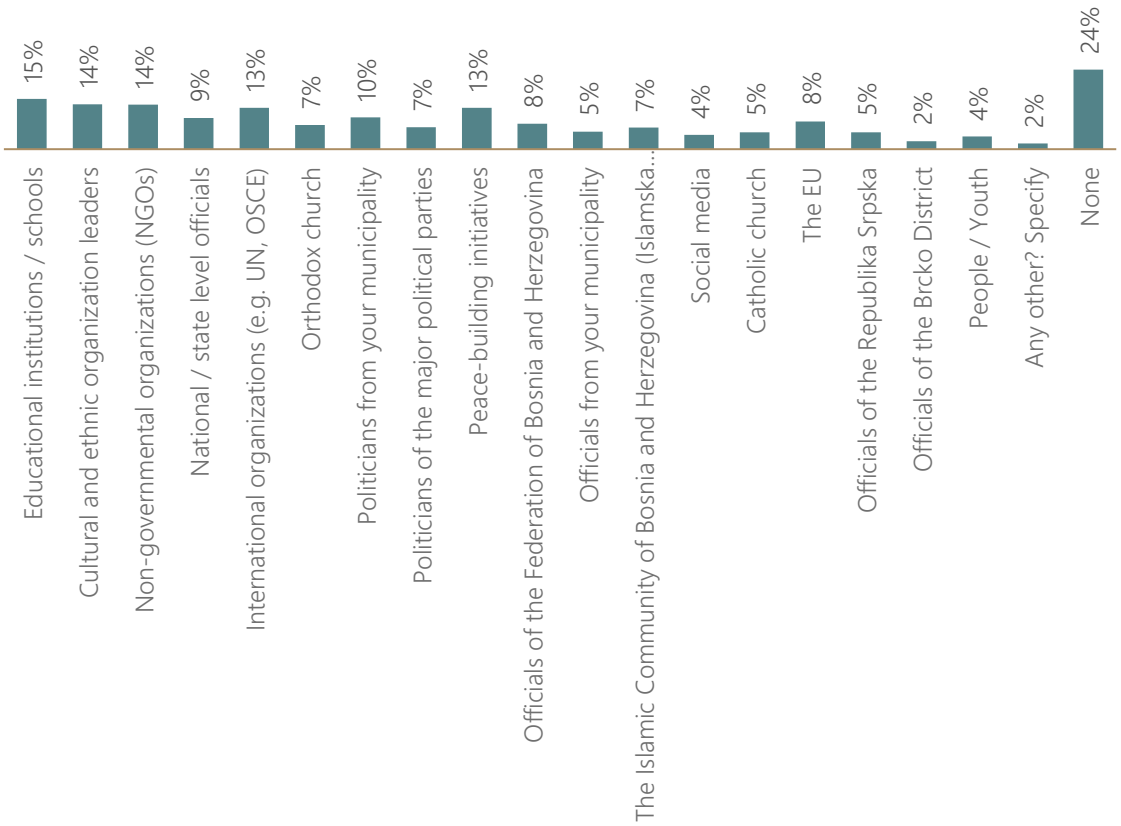
Figure 28: Actors with a positive role in improving inter-ethnic relations in municipalities. National survey (% of respondents)



Trust in any single actor to improve inter-ethnic relations is also limited. When asked who they trust to improve inter-ethnic relations in their municipality, no actor receives more than 15% of responses. The highest levels of trust are placed in educational institutions and schools (15%), cultural and ethnic organization leaders (14%), non-governmental organizations (14%), and international organizations and peacebuilding initiatives (13%). Political and religious actors, as well as official institutions at various levels, consistently receive less trust, typically in single digits. Almost a quarter

of respondents (24%) say they do not trust any actor to improve inter-ethnic relations. The absence of trusted leadership is especially clear among Serb respondents, 35% of whom say they trust no actor to improve inter-ethnic relations, compared to 24% of Croat and 17% of Bosniak respondents.

Figure 29: Actors trusted to improve inter-ethnic relations in municipalities



The municipality surveys show a similar absence of clearly trusted leadership, while also pointing to important local variation. In most municipalities, no group receives more than one third of responses as playing a leading positive role. Recognition is split among officials, organizations, religious and educational groups, and international actors. Non-governmental organizations stand out only in Bratunac (32%) and Velika Kladuša (29%), while educational institutions or schools receive the highest share in Velika Kladuša (31%) but are much less frequently named elsewhere. In some locations, such as Stolac and Goražde, no actor receives even 10% of responses. Rogatica stands out most clearly, with 69% of respondents saying that no actors play a positive role at all.

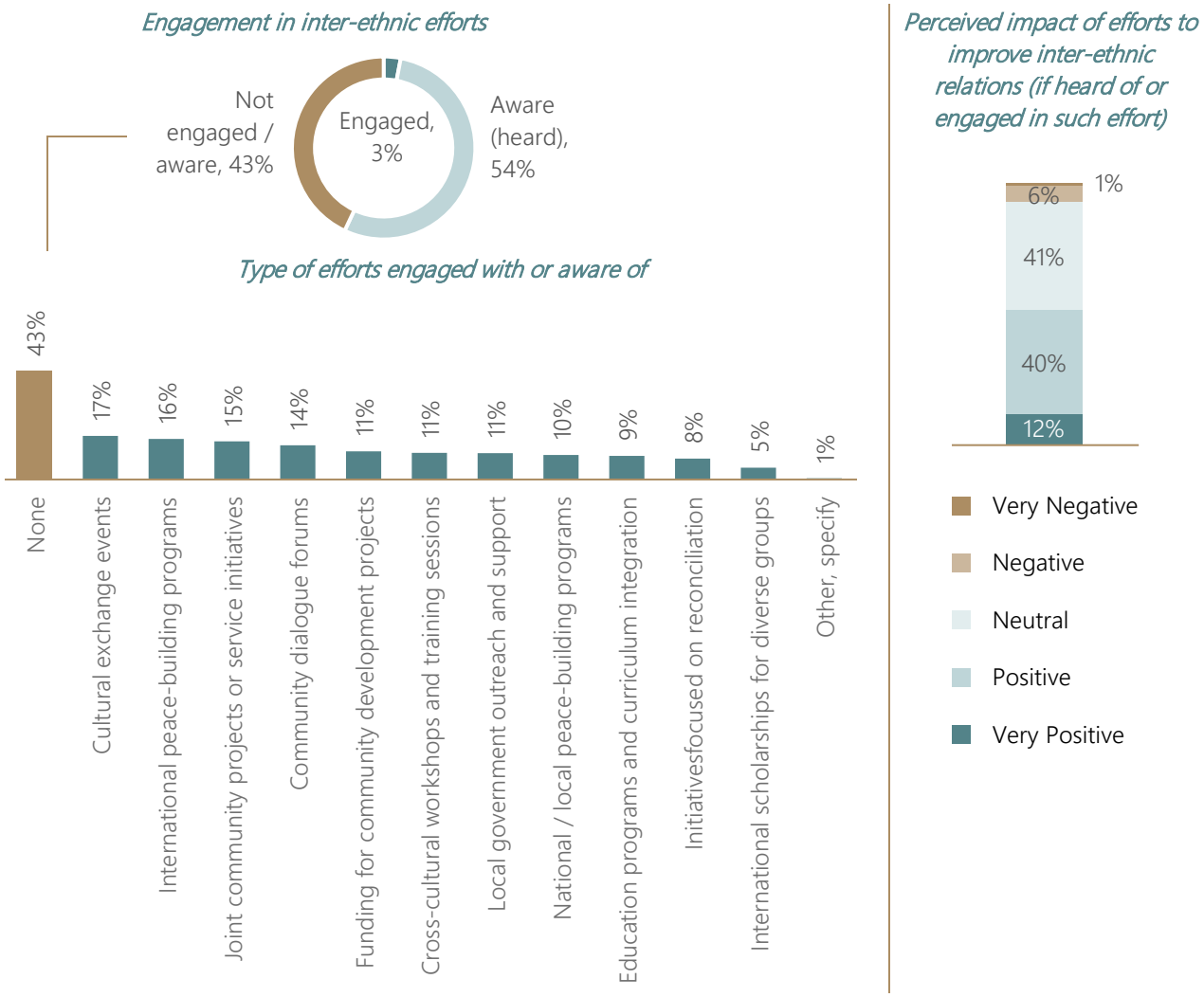
The same pattern appears when respondents are asked who they trust to improve inter-ethnic relations. Trust is nearly absent in some communities. In Rogatica, 83% say they do not trust any actor to play a constructive role, and this sentiment is also very widespread in Goražde (70%), Prijedor (34%), and Busovača (19%). Where trust does appear, it tends to be distributed among a range of actors, with few receiving broad confidence across locations. In Stolac, 63% trust officials of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in Bratunac, 36% trust the European Union. Non-governmental organizations are named by almost a third of respondents in Bratunac (29%) and Čapljina (29%). In Velika Kladuša, local and international actors, as well as educational institutions, receive between 16% and 22% each, but no one group stands out clearly above the rest.

LIMITED AWARENESS AND MIXED PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT.

The limited trust in actors who could lead inter-ethnic efforts may be linked to the limited reach and visibility of such initiatives. Most people in Bosnia and Herzegovina have little direct experience with efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations. Nationally, 43% have neither heard of nor participated in such activities, 54% have heard of such efforts, and only 3% report having been directly engaged.

Awareness of specific initiatives is even more limited. Fewer than one in five respondents have heard of community dialogue forums (14%), cultural exchange events (17%), international peacebuilding programs (16%), or joint community projects (15%). Among those who have heard of or participated in efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations, about half judge their impact positively, including 40% who say positive and 12% very positive. However, a large share remains neutral (41%), and 7% judge the impact as negative or very negative.

Figure 30: Engagement with and impact of efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations
National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality results show that awareness and experience vary widely. In Prijedor, Rogatica, and Goražde, a majority of respondents have neither heard of nor participated in initiatives to improve inter-ethnic relations, ranging from 47% to 61%. By contrast, in Čapljina, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša, awareness is much higher and only a small minority reports

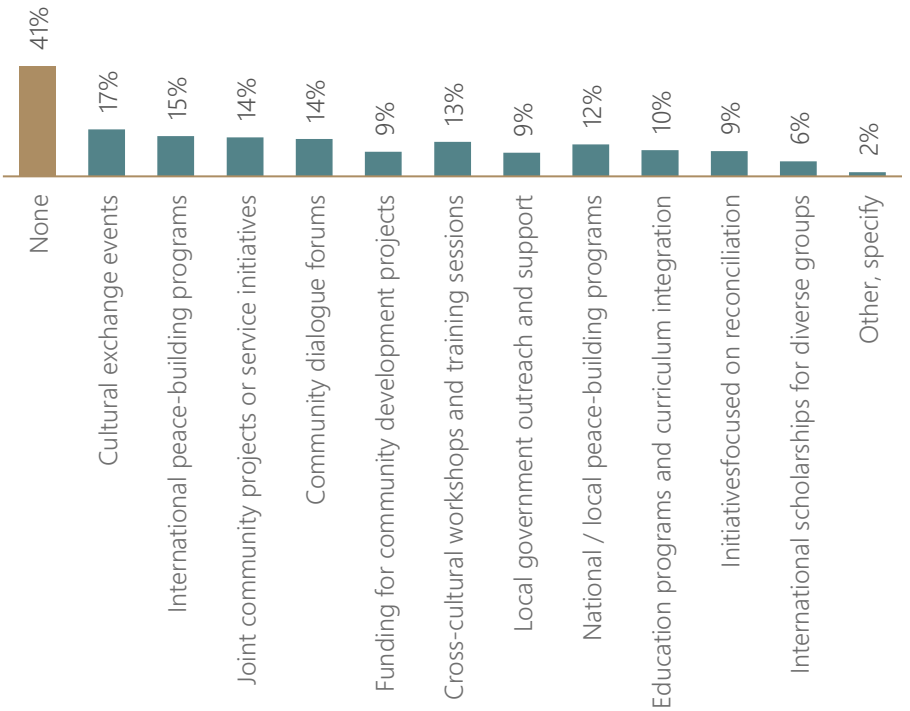
no exposure to such efforts. The types of efforts people have heard of or joined also differ locally. Funding for community development projects is most visible in Bratunac (45%), while cultural exchange events and community projects are cited by one in three or more respondents in Čapljina, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša.

Views on the impact of these efforts are also cautious and uneven. Among those who have heard of or engaged with efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations, positive assessments are most common in Bratunac and Prijedor, where 54% and 43% respectively perceive a positive impact. In Čapljina, most respondents see the outcomes as neutral or even negative. Negative or very negative assessments are particularly common in Rogatica, where 30% describe the impact as negative and 9% as very negative, as well as in Goražde and Stolac.

LOW WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE

The limited reach of existing initiatives and mixed perceptions of their impact may help explain why few respondents express willingness to engage in efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations, even though such efforts are often seen as important (see sections 1.1 and 2.1). At the national level, 41% of respondents say they would not be willing to engage in any current efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations. Among those willing to participate, the most popular options are cultural exchange events (17%) and international peacebuilding programs (15%). Community dialogue forums and joint community projects are each selected by 14%. Educational programs, cross-cultural workshops, and national or local peacebuilding programs attract between 10% and 13%. Fewer respondents are willing to engage in international scholarships for diverse groups (6%), with only 2% indicating other efforts. Willingness to engage in current efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations is lowest among Serb respondents with 51% saying they would not be willing to engage in any such efforts, compared to 36% of Bosniak respondents and 31% of Croat respondents.

Figure 31: Domestic and/or international efforts to improve inter-ethnic relations that participants are willing to engage in. National survey (% of respondents).



The municipality surveys again show considerable variation. In Prijedor and Rogatica, lack of willingness is most pronounced, with 62% and 44% respectively saying they would not take part in any activities. Conversely, in Čapljina

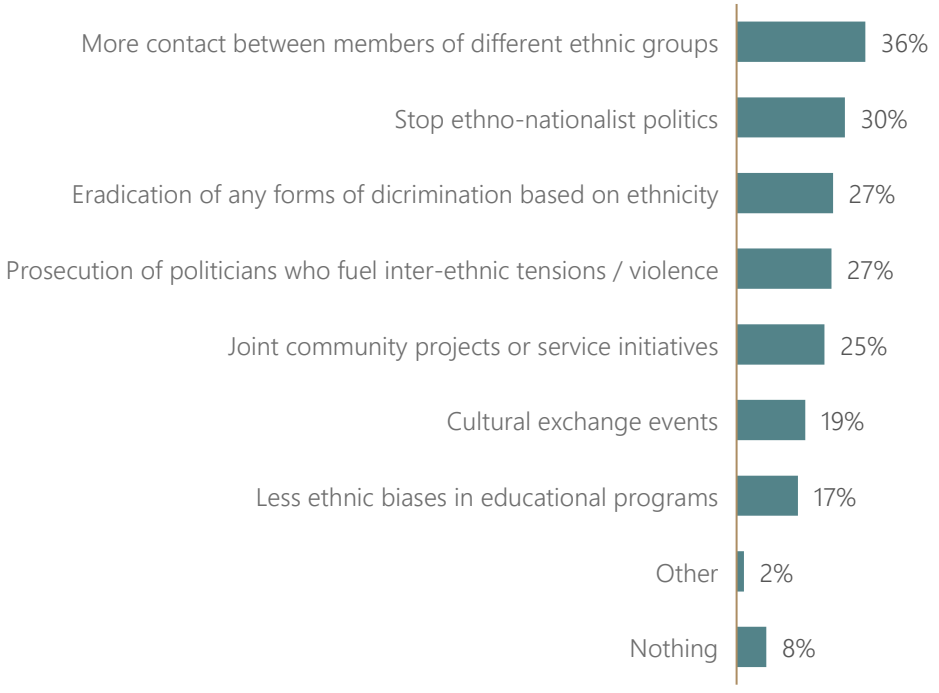
and Stolac, almost all respondents indicate willingness to participate, particularly in joint community projects, government outreach, and cultural exchange events, all above 30% in these areas. Funding for community development projects stands out in Bratunac (28%), while international peacebuilding programs attract comparatively higher engagement in Čapljina, Goražde, and Velika Kladuša, ranging from 13% to 34%. Educational initiatives are especially popular in Čapljina and Stolac, at 27% and 29% respectively, while interest in such initiatives remains low elsewhere.

2.6 PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PRACTICAL COOPERATION AND REFORMS

MEASURES TO IMPROVE INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

The previous sections highlight slow progress, persistent barriers, and limited trust in actors expected to advance inter-ethnic relations. At the same time, the survey also shows that many people identify concrete ways to build greater social cohesion. Respondents most often call for more contact between members of different ethnic groups (36%). Many also support practical steps such as joint community projects or service initiatives (25%), increased cultural exchange events (19%), and reducing ethnic bias in education (17%). Addressing political and structural challenges is also seen as vital: 30% believe ethno-nationalist politics should be stopped, while 27% support prosecuting politicians who fuel tensions and 27% want to eradicate all forms of ethnic discrimination. Only a small minority see nothing that needs to be done (8%). These results show that the public favors a combination of increased everyday interaction, institutional reform, and stronger action against the political drivers of division.

Figure 32: Measures to improve inter-ethnic relations
National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show that proposed mechanisms are shaped by distinct local circumstances and histories. In Velika Kladuša (39%) and Bratunac (35%), the most common response is to encourage more contact between members of different ethnic groups. In contrast, this is much less emphasized in Prijedor (14%) and Čapljina (10%), where calls for change are focused elsewhere. In several municipalities, including Čapljina (36%) and Stolac (40%), reducing ethnic bias in education is a top priority. Calls for more cultural exchange events are especially high in Stolac (55%), Čapljina (44%), and Busovača (34%). In Čapljina (54%), Stolac (42%), and Velika Kladuša (39%), many residents also value joint community projects or service initiatives as the best way forward. Similarly, there is strong support for

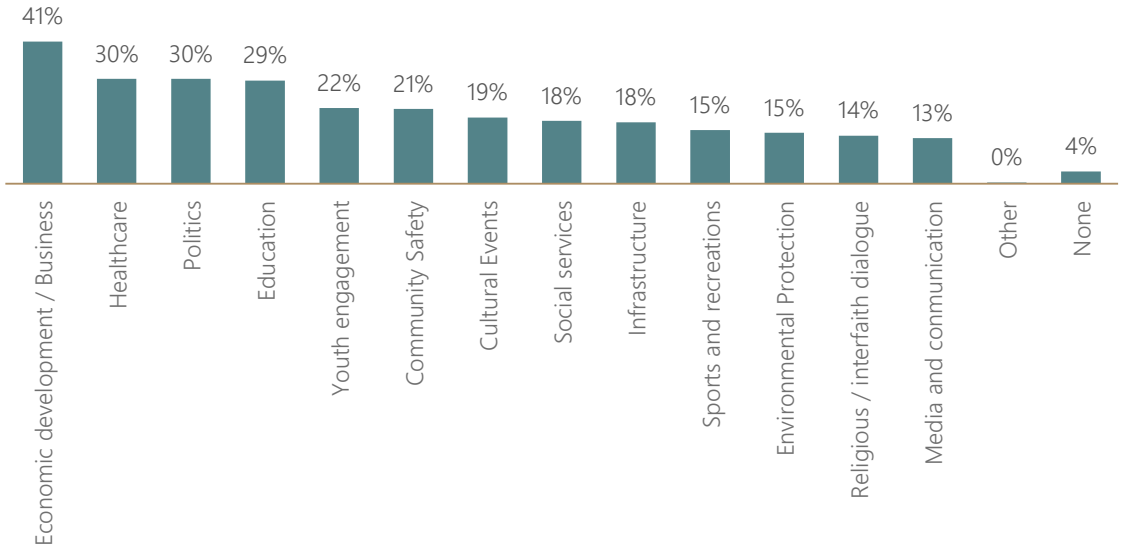
eradicating discrimination based on ethnicity in Busovača (37%), Čapljina (41%), Stolac (41%), and Velika Kladuša (42%).

More political measures are also seen as vital in some places, with almost half of respondents in Busovača (47%) and Velika Kladuša (45%) calling for an end to ethno-nationalist politics, and more than a third in Busovača (37%) and Velika Kladuša (51%) supporting prosecution of politicians who fuel ethnic tensions. These findings show that there is no single approach endorsed everywhere, yet few respondents across all municipalities, between 0% and 16%, feel nothing should be done.

PRIORITY SECTORS FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS

When asked about priority sectors or domains for improving inter-ethnic relations, respondents most often point to economic development and business (41%), healthcare (30%), politics (30%), and education (29%). These answers largely reflect the overall priorities of respondents discussed in the first section, as well as perceived root causes of tensions in the country. Community safety (21%) and youth engagement (22%) are also commonly mentioned, though less frequently. Additional areas highlighted include infrastructure, culture, environment, and social services, each cited by about one in five participants. Only a small minority (4%) do not identify any specific area in need of improvement.

Figure 33: Priority sectors or domains for improved inter-ethnic relations
National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings again show considerable variation, reflecting specific local contexts and perceived needs. In Bratunac, an overwhelming majority (77%) see economic development and business as the main area where better inter-ethnic relations are needed, much higher than in other municipalities. In contrast, this domain is identified by only single digit percentages in Čapljina (9%) and Stolac (9%), while it remains a priority for about a third of respondents in Goražde (36%) and more than half in Velika Kladuša (51%). Education stands out as a priority in Velika Kladuša (45%), Goražde (30%), and Prijedor (26%). Healthcare is especially important in Stolac (32%), Velika Kladuša (34%), and Goražde (26%). Infrastructure and environmental protection are priorities in Čapljina and Stolac, while community safety is also named frequently in these and other municipalities. Politics is highlighted as important for improved relations in Prijedor (25%), Rogatica (36%), Busovača (45%), and Velika Kladuša (31%). Cultural events,

sports, and youth engagement are considered key in some municipalities, with Velika Kladuša again showing strong emphasis on youth (31%). Only a small proportion of respondents, typically less than 10% per location, say no areas require improvement.

Focus group discussions help explain why practical sectors such as work, health services, education, sport, and culture appear repeatedly in the survey. Participants in Brčko and Prijedor often emphasized that ordinary people maintain friendly and functional relations in daily life. Neighbors help one another, colleagues work side by side, and people share public spaces and social activities without major problems. In Stolac, respondents acknowledged more visible structural separations yet still pointed to examples of practical cooperation in business, agriculture, health services, hospitality, and personal friendships.

> *"Well, the highest level of cooperation between Bosniaks and Croats in Stolac can probably be seen in the health center, in trade, the economy, hospitality. It is true that people of different faiths still live and cooperate successfully, but that political and social tensions exist is also very obvious." (Stolac participant)* [25]

Education appears across the findings both as a priority area for reform and as a potential space for building inter-ethnic understanding. While education was noted in earlier sections as a barrier because of segregation and ethnic bias, many focus group participants nevertheless saw schools as crucial for building understanding. In Brčko, respondents highlighted that mixed schooling in some contexts had allowed them to meet peers from other backgrounds and form friendships.

> *"…What has been created here, well, is joint education in Brčko. There weren't, in fact, two schools under one roof as elsewhere. Education here is integrated." (Brčko participant)*[26]

In Prijedor, however, the education system was sometimes described as a polarizing factor, with curricula and teaching practices reinforcing divisions and limiting respect for different identities. Similarly, in Stolac, participants recognized segregated schooling as a major obstacle, while also seeing schools as potential sites of integration if reforms could introduce inclusive curricula, joint classes, and intercultural education.

Participants also emphasized the role of youth programs, NGOs, and local initiatives. Younger generations were often described as more open, pragmatic, and willing to build relationships across ethnic lines. Participants described how young people socialize, play sports, attend cultural events, and work together without regard to ethnic background. These everyday interactions were seen as important for fostering trust and reducing stereotypes. Civil society organizations and youth programs were recognized as supporting this process by creating opportunities for dialogue, cultural exchange, and joint work.

> *"There are also civil society organizations, youth organizations, and educational institutions… they launch projects that promote dialogue, tolerance, and joint work… especially among us young people." (Brčko participant)*[27]

In Stolac, NGOs and civic initiatives were recognized as constructive, although participants stressed that their influence is constrained by political pressures and limited resources. Nevertheless, local projects that brought together Croat and Bosniak youth were viewed as promising for building bridges.

Focus group participants also identified sports, cultural activities, and informal social spaces as some of the most effective avenues for inter-ethnic cooperation. In Brčko, participants emphasized that sports competitions and humanitarian events bring together young people regardless of background. In Prijedor, everyday cooperation in workplaces and joint participation in cultural events were seen as opportunities for building trust. In Stolac, sports and agriculture were cited as rare but meaningful areas where Croats and Bosniaks work and socialize together, demonstrating that shared interests can transcend ethnic boundaries.

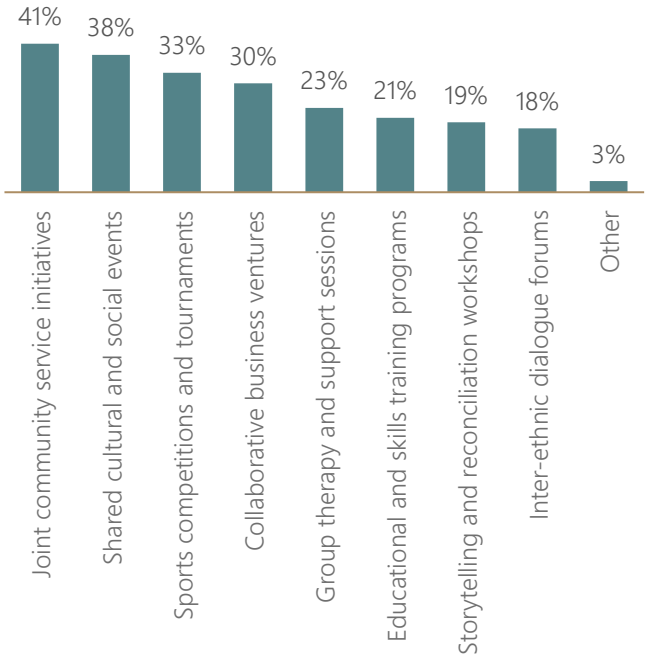
"So, Stolac football, that is sport by its very nature, brings people together, and I think it is pointless for politicians to try to divide them, because sport will sooner or later unite people in one way or another." (Stolac participant) [28]

Participants in focus groups also reflected on the role of the international community in post-war recovery and reconciliation. They acknowledged important contributions in the immediate aftermath of the conflict and in specific initiatives, including support for returns, housing reconstruction, infrastructure, humanitarian aid, dialogue programs, training, and workshops. However, they also expressed skepticism about the depth and sustainability of international involvement. A common theme was that international actors can create space for dialogue and reconstruction, but long-term reconciliation depends on local communities and institutions.

VETERANS INTEGRATION

The survey also asked respondents what could improve the integration of veterans from all ethnic backgrounds, an issue identified earlier as one of the more sensitive areas of inter-ethnic participation. Respondents most frequently mention joint community service initiatives (41%), shared cultural and social events (38%), and sports competitions (33%). Many also support collaborative business ventures (30%). Fewer respondents choose educational programs (21%), group therapy (23%), storytelling workshops (19%), or inter-ethnic dialogue forums (18%), but there is still notable interest in these more dialogue based approaches.

Figure 34: Measures to improve the integration of veterans from all ethnic groups in the community
National survey (% of respondents)



Proposed approaches to improve the integration of veterans from all ethnic backgrounds vary across municipalities. Collaborative business ventures are among the most popular integration approaches in Prijedor (41%), Busovača (41%), Čapljina (47%), and Stolac (52%). Sports competitions are particularly favored in Busovača (58%), Velika Kladuša (53%), and Stolac (48%). Shared cultural and social events are a top choice in Velika Kladuša (45%), Prijedor (39%), and Busovača (41%). Joint community service initiatives also receive strong support in Prijedor (40%), Velika Kladuša (36%),

and Busovača (37%). Educational and skills training programs are prioritized in Čapljina (49%) and Stolac (44%) but less elsewhere. Group therapy and storytelling workshops are especially supported in Stolac (39% and 28%) and Velika Kladuša (35% and 27%), compared to lower demand in other municipalities. Interest in inter-ethnic dialogue forums is generally low, except for Velika Kladuša (25%).

RESULTS

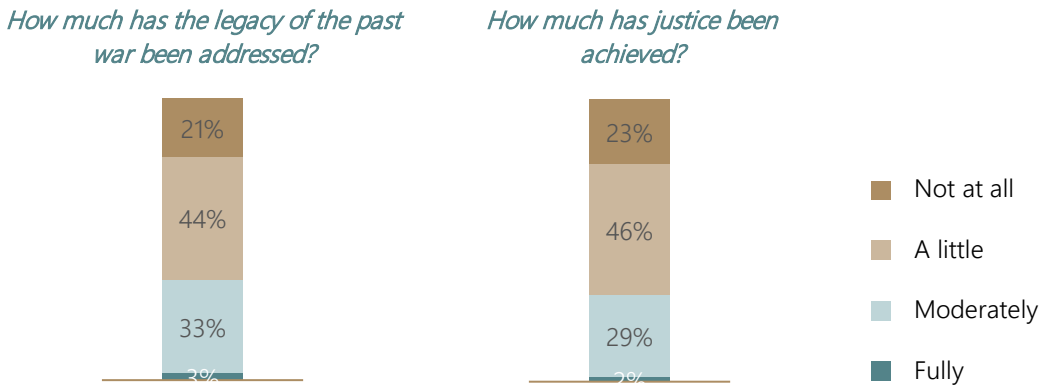
3. JUSTICE AND THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

3.1 JUSTICE REMAINS INCOMPLETE AS CONTINUED ACTION IS SUPPORTED

JUSTICE AND DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF THE WAR ARE SEEN AS INCOMPLETE

Despite hundreds of domestic war crimes trials having been completed since the war, most people in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not feel that justice has been achieved or that the legacy of the war has been fully addressed. Very few respondents believe that justice for war crimes has fully been achieved (2%), or that the legacy of the war has been fully addressed (3%). Most say justice has been achieved only "a little" (46%) or "moderately" (29%). Similarly, most respondents say the legacy of the war has been addressed only "a little" (44%) or "moderately" (33%). About one in five feel these issues have not been addressed at all. Croat respondents are the least likely to say that justice has not been achieved (little or not at all, 57%) compared to Serb respondents (69%) and Bosniak respondents (71%).

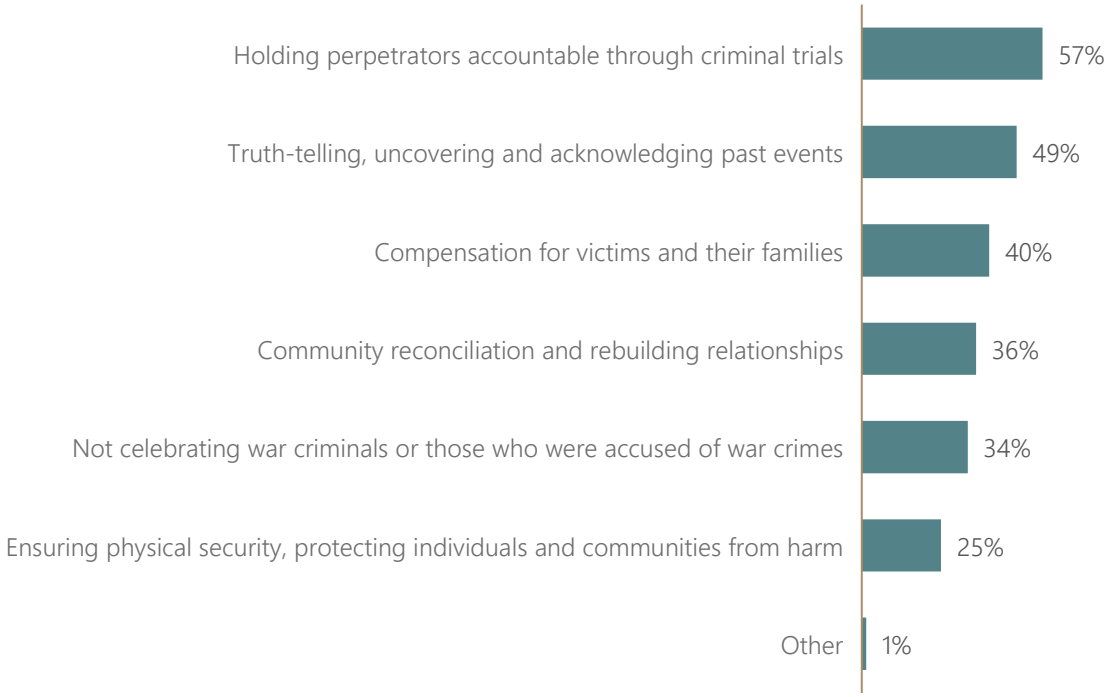
Figure 35: Achievement of Justice - National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show the same broad pattern. Across all municipalities, almost no one believes that justice for war crimes has been fully achieved. At most, 3% say so in Čapljina, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša. In most places, the majority feel that justice has only been achieved "a little," including 66% in Bratunac and 56% in Velika Kladuša, or "moderately," including 48% in Stolac and 41% in Busovača. Stronger dissatisfaction is present in Rogatica and Goražde, where 60% and 51% respectively say justice has not been achieved at all. Similarly, when asked whether the broader legacy of war has been addressed, very few respondents feel the issue has been fully dealt with. In Rogatica and Goražde, over half say it has not been addressed at all, 58% and 54% respectively.

This sense of incomplete justice is possibly explained by the fact that people define justice broadly. For most respondents, justice in the post-war context mainly means holding perpetrators accountable through criminal trials (57%). Many also believe in the importance of truth-telling and acknowledging past events (49%) and providing compensation for victims and their families (40%). There is also notable support for community reconciliation and rebuilding relationships (36%), not celebrating war criminals or those accused of war crimes (34%) or ensuring physical security (25%). Overall, justice is not understood only as legal accountability, but also as public recognition of the truth, support for victims, and restoring community trust.

Figure 36: Definition of "justice" - National survey (% of respondents)



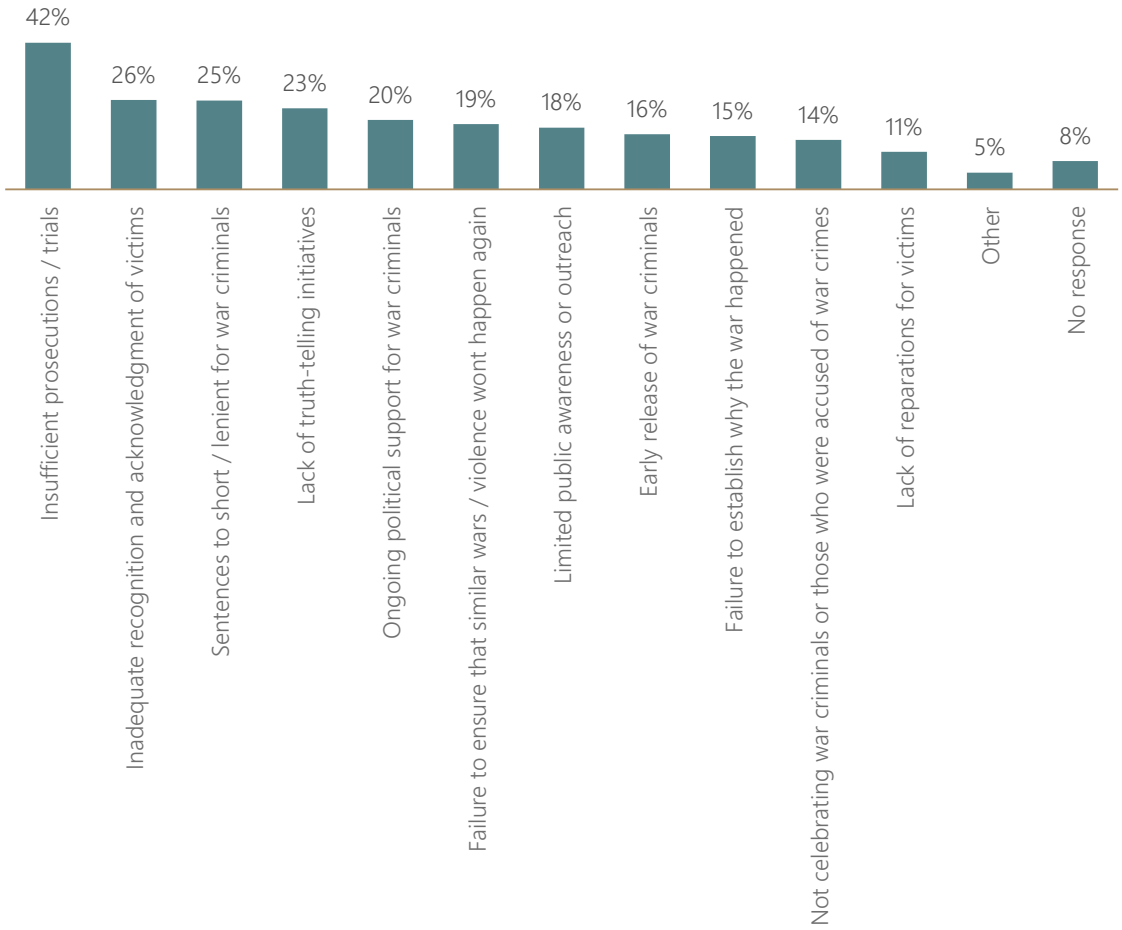
Municipality findings show that the meaning of justice varies substantially by local context. In Velika Kladuša, justice most often means holding perpetrators accountable through criminal trials (76%) and truth-telling (69%), while these are much less emphasized in Bratunac (15% and 12% respectively). In Čapljina, truth-telling is emphasized by 52%, while criminal trials are mentioned by 14%. For many respondents in Stolac and Čapljina, community reconciliation and rebuilding relationships are central to justice, at 59% and 61% respectively. Compensation for victims and their families appears in nearly half of responses in Prijedor (48%), Stolac (49%), and Velika Kladuša (51%), but is less central in Rogatica (13%). Some see justice as ensuring physical security, especially in Stolac (44%) and Velika Kladuša (37%). Not celebrating war criminals or those accused of war crimes stands out as part of justice for many in Velika Kladuša (58%) and Busovača (36%), but is rarely mentioned in Bratunac or Rogatica, both at 4%.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING JUSTICE

When asked more directly why justice has not been achieved, respondents highlight concrete shortcomings. The most common reasons are insufficient prosecutions or trials (42%) and inadequate recognition and acknowledgment of victims (26%). Many also point to short or lenient sentences for war criminals (25%), lack of truth-telling initiatives (23%), and ongoing political support for war criminals (20%). Some also mention failure to ensure that such crimes will not be repeated (19%) and limited public awareness (18%).

The reasons given vary across municipalities. In Velika Kladuša, the most common explanation is insufficient prosecutions or trials (60%). In Stolac, lack of recognition and acknowledgment of victims (44%) and limited public awareness or outreach (43%) are major concerns. Čapljina stands out for concern about failure to establish why the war happened (41%) and lack of truth-telling initiatives (34%). In Busovača, respondents frequently mention lenient sentences (26%) and early release of war criminals (22%). Ongoing political support for war criminals is also noted in several municipalities, especially Velika Kladuša (53%) and Busovača (30%). Reparations or compensation for victims are less often mentioned as the main issue, except in Stolac (22%), Čapljina (21%), and Velika Kladuša (26%).

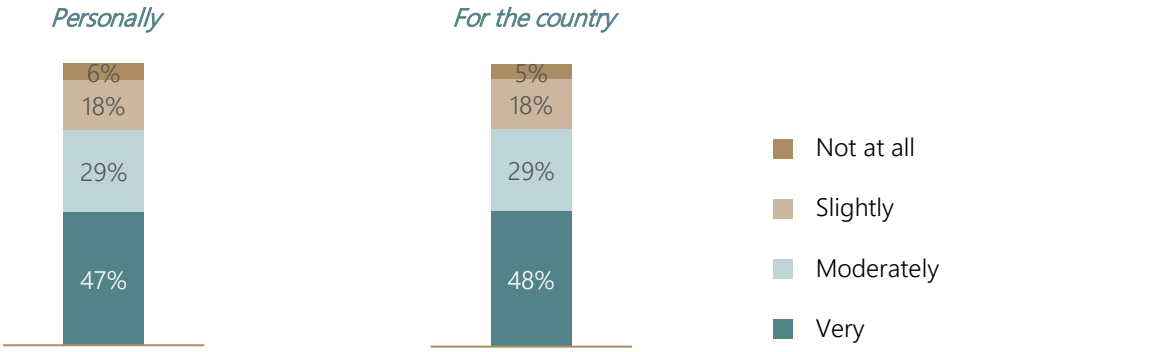
Figure 37: Factors hindering the achievement of justice - National survey (% of respondents)



Despite these shortcomings, most respondents still consider it important to continue efforts to achieve justice for what happened during the war. As noted earlier in section 1.1, continuing efforts are considered very important by 47% of respondents personally and by 48% for the country, with another 29% in both cases describing these efforts as moderately important. Very few respondents say such efforts are not important at all, 6% personally and 5% for the country. Support for continuing justice efforts is strongest among Bosniak respondents. A majority of Bosniak respondents say such efforts are very important personally (56%) and for the country (56%), compared to 41% and 42%, respectively, among Serb respondents and 27% and 33% among Croat respondents.

Locally, however, there is strong variation. In Bratunac and Velika Kladuša, 76% see justice efforts as very important personally, and 84% and 78% respectively see them as very important for the country. Respondents are more divided in Busovača, with about half noting justice as very important, 46% personally and 51% for the country. In contrast, Čapljina is much lower, with only 4% to 5% saying justice efforts are very important. Stolac and Goražde also show less intensity, with fewer than 15% calling justice efforts very important for either themselves or the country, and many considering them only slightly or not at all important, 49% and 45% in Stolac, and 31% and 28% in Goražde. Prijedor and Rogatica fall between these patterns, with support split across the response categories.

Figure 38: Importance of continuing efforts to achieve justice for what happened during the war National survey (% of respondents)*

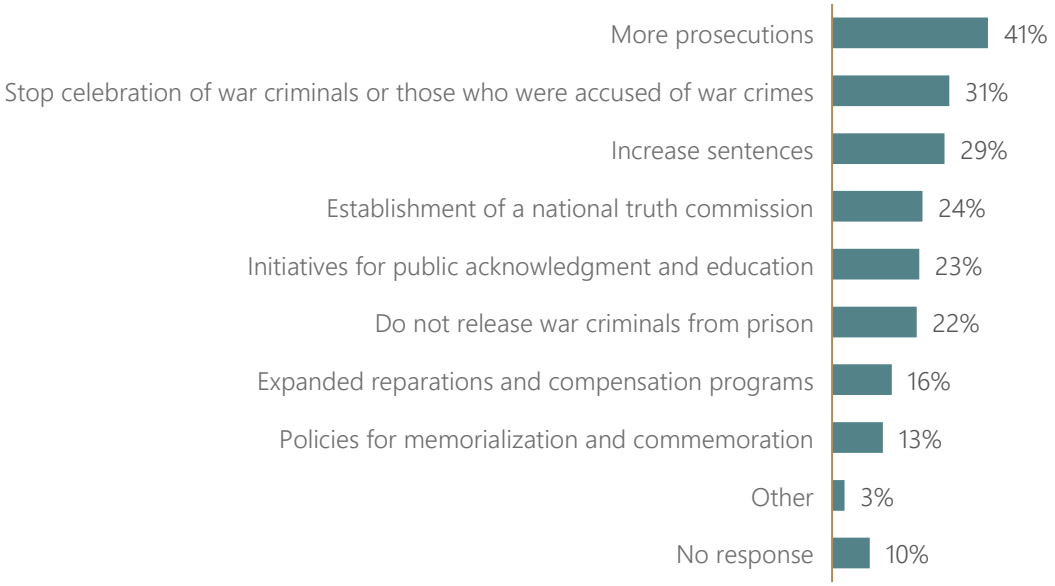


* *Data presented is section 1.1 is repeated here in association with perceived limited progress in achieving justice.*

MEASURES TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE

When asked what, if anything, should be done to achieve justice, respondents most often point to stronger legal action, public recognition of the truth, support for victims, and ending the glorification of those accused of war crimes. The most common answer is more prosecution (41%), showing continued demand for legal accountability. Relating to criminal prosecutions, many also want harsher sentences (29%) and for war criminals not to be released from prison (22%). Beyond prosecution, about a third (31%) think the celebration of war criminals or those accused of war crimes should stop. There is also support for broader efforts, including creating a national truth commission (24%), initiatives for public acknowledgment and education (23%), expanded reparations and compensation for victims (16%), and policies for memorialization and commemoration (13%).

Figure 39: Measures to achieve justice - National survey (% of respondents)



Bosniak respondents are most likely to call for more prosecutions (49%), increased sentences (36%), stopping the celebration of war criminals or those accused of war crimes (39%), and not releasing war criminals from prison (28%). Croat respondents are more likely to support establishing a national truth commission (47%), stopping the celebration of war criminals or those accused of war crimes (51%), memorialization and commemoration policies (31%), and public

acknowledgment and education (31%). Serb respondents are less likely to select most proposed measures and more likely to give no response (18%).

Municipality results show that what people see as necessary for justice depends strongly on where they live. In Velika Kladuša, the main calls are for more prosecutions (56%), harsher sentences (56%), and ending celebrations of war criminals (61%). In Busovača (47%) and Stolac (39%), stopping public celebration of accused war criminals stands out. Čapljina places most weight on public acknowledgment and education (49%), a national truth commission (46%), and memorialization (48%). Expanded reparations and compensation matter most in Stolac (39%) and Čapljina (34%) but are much less of a focus elsewhere. Calls for a national truth commission are high in Čapljina (46%) and Stolac (49%). Across many places, about a third support increased sentences for war crimes, with higher numbers in Velika Kladuša and Busovača. Respondents in Bratunac and Rogatica are less likely to name specific actions, with around a quarter not responding to the question.

Despite the perception that justice has not been achieved, most people reject the idea of taking justice into their own hands when it comes to war crimes. Nationally, 62% say participating in or supporting mob justice against suspects is not acceptable, and 66% reject taking the law into their own hands to punish those perceived as guilty. Using intimidation or threats is even less accepted, with 70% saying it is not acceptable at all. Still, a significant minority considers these actions at least slightly acceptable. For example, 37% see some level of acceptability in mob justice, including 5% who see it as very acceptable, 17% moderately acceptable, and 15% slightly acceptable. Similar numbers, 34%, feel at least some vigilante punishment is acceptable, and 30% feel the same about intimidation or threats.

Figure 40: Acceptability of taking justice in one's own hands - National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings show wide variation. In Bratunac, Prijedor, Rogatica, Busovača, Goražde, and Velika Kladuša, strong majorities reject these actions. For instance, 68% to 76% in Bratunac and Prijedor say mob justice is not acceptable at all, with even higher rejection for vigilante punishment and threats, 87% to 95%. In contrast, Čapljina and Stolac stand out for much greater acceptance of mob justice, vigilante action, and intimidation. In Čapljina, only 10% to 13% firmly reject mob justice or taking the law into one's own hands, while 58% and 53% say these actions are at least slightly acceptable. Stolac shows a similar pattern, with nearly half open to either mob justice (49%) or vigilantism (49%), and only 11% and 9% totally opposed. Acceptance of intimidation or threats as slightly or more acceptable is also high in these two places, 56% in Čapljina and 46% in Stolac. Other municipalities, including Goražde, Busovača, and Velika Kladuša, show strong rejection, but a smaller portion still finds these responses at least slightly acceptable, for example 24% to 26% in Goražde.

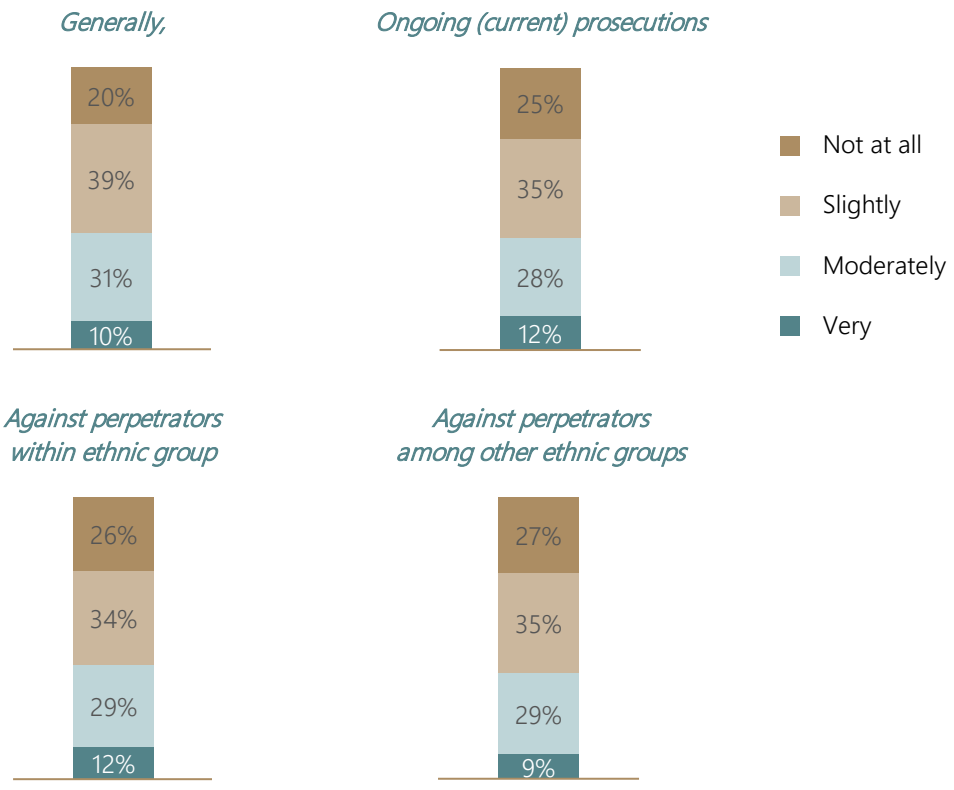
3.2 LIMITED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC WAR CRIMES TRIALS

AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN DOMESTIC PROSECUTIONS

Criminal justice has been central to post-war justice efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but most people have limited knowledge or personal experience with domestic war crimes prosecutions. Just 10% of respondents say they are very aware of past cases, and 12% are very aware of ongoing prosecutions. Instead, the largest groups say they are only slightly aware, 39% for past cases and 35% for ongoing cases, or moderately aware, 31% for past cases and 28% for ongoing cases. Around one in five or one in four respondents are not aware at all, especially when it comes to current prosecutions.

Awareness of specific domestic prosecutions is also relatively low, whether the alleged perpetrators come from respondents' own ethnic community or from other groups. Only 12% say they are very aware of prosecutions against people from their own community, and 9% say the same for prosecutions against people from other communities. Most respondents describe themselves as only slightly or moderately aware, and about a quarter are not aware at all, 26% for prosecutions involving respondents' own group and 27% for prosecutions involving other groups.

Figure 41: Awareness about domestic prosecutions for war crimes
National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show a similar pattern, while also pointing to local variation. Across the surveyed municipalities, most respondents have only a vague sense or little knowledge about both past and current domestic war crimes prosecutions. Awareness of past cases is highest in Bratunac, where 26% say they are very aware, but

drops to just 1% in Stolac and 5% in Čapljina. In most locations, respondents are more likely to say they are slightly or moderately aware, especially in Busovača and Čapljina, where about half describe themselves as slightly aware. In Rogatica and Goražde, more than 30% report that they are not aware at all. Awareness of ongoing prosecutions follows a similar pattern. Very few respondents say they are very aware, ranging from 3% in Stolac to 27% in Bratunac. Many again describe themselves as moderately or slightly aware, while lack of awareness is highest in Prijedor, where 33% say they are not aware at all, and Goražde, where 19% say the same.

At the municipality level, there is also limited difference between awareness of prosecutions involving people from respondents' own ethnic group and prosecutions involving other groups. Across municipalities, only a small percentage say they are very aware, with the highest being 15% in Velika Kladuša and most places below 10%. The majority describe themselves as slightly or moderately aware, with these categories making up more than 70% of responses almost everywhere. In several municipalities, including Busovača, Čapljina, Goražde, and Stolac, more than half of respondents are only slightly aware. Lack of awareness is particularly high in Prijedor, where 30% are not aware at all of prosecutions involving their own group and 41% are not aware at all of prosecutions involving other groups, and in Goražde, where the figures are 30% and 26%.

Direct engagement in domestic prosecutions related to war crimes is rare. Very few respondents report direct or family involvement in domestic war crimes prosecutions. Only 2% participated as witnesses, 1% as victims, and 1% as defendants, while 97% were not involved. The pattern is similar for family members, with 95% reporting that no family member was involved. Direct contact with authorities about these cases is also uncommon. Only 1% have been part of an investigation and 2% have provided testimony or evidence. Nearly all respondents, 97%, have never been contacted. Attendance at war crimes trials is also very low: 1% attended as a participant and 6% as an observer, while 93% say they have never attended a trial.

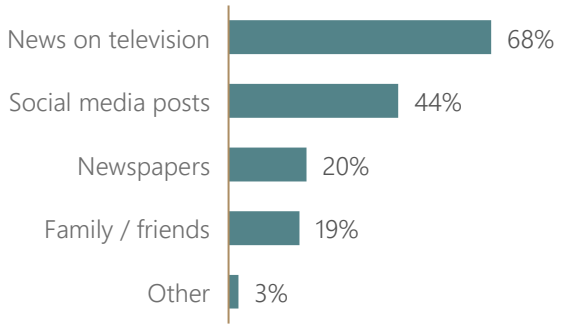
Municipality findings confirm that these processes remain distant from the personal experience of most people. In Prijedor, Rogatica, Busovača, and Goražde, between 94% and 100% say they have not been involved themselves. In Bratunac and Čapljina, personal involvement is somewhat higher, but still only reaches 8% to 11% at most for any role. Involvement as a victim or defendant is especially rare, with most municipalities reporting 0% to 1%, although Čapljina stands out with 11% reporting involvement as a victim and 8% as a defendant. Family involvement is similarly low, with almost all figures under 10%. Bratunac, Stolac, and Čapljina show slightly more cases where a family member was a witness or victim, but in all municipalities the majority report no family involvement. Contact with law enforcement or prosecutors is also uncommon everywhere, with the highest level in Bratunac, where 9% report being contacted as part of an investigation, while elsewhere this generally ranges from 1% to 4%. When it comes to attending war crimes trials, Bratunac again stands out, with 9% saying they attended as a participant and 21% as an observer. In all other municipalities, attendance is much lower, with fewer than 6% ever attending as an observer.

INFORMATION SOURCES AND ACCESS

With limited direct exposure to trials, information about war crimes prosecutions comes mainly from television news and social media. Nationally, 68% of respondents mention television news as a source of information, while 44% mention social media posts. Newspapers are mentioned by 20%, and family or friends by 19%. Few respondents rely on other types of information, 3%.

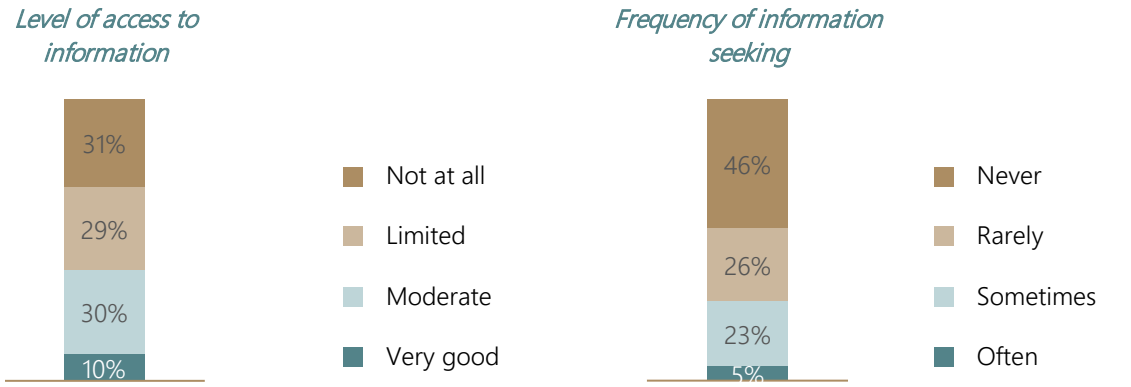
Municipality results show that television is the dominant source of information in most places, with especially high reliance in Bratunac (91%) and Goražde (85%). Newspapers are much more common sources in Stolac (74%) and Čapljina (69%) than elsewhere. Social media is especially important in Velika Kladuša (62%) and Stolac (46%).

Figure 42: Sources of information about domestic war crime trials



Access to information is also limited. Only 10% of respondents say they have very good access to information about domestic war crimes trials, while 31% say they have no access at all. Active information seeking is also rare. Almost half of respondents, 46%, have never tried to find out more about prosecutions, and only 5% say they do so often. The rest look for information sometimes, 23%, or rarely, 26%.

Figure 43: Access to information about domestic war crime trials - National survey (% of respondents)



Across municipalities, very few respondents say they often seek out information about war crimes trials, ranging from 4% in Stolac to 9% in Velika Kladuša. In contrast, many never look for information at all, especially in Goražde (71%) and Rogatica (66%). Perceived access to information also varies. In Rogatica, 62% say they have no access, while in Stolac only 7% report no access. Very few respondents in any municipality feel very well informed, rarely rising above 6% to 9%.

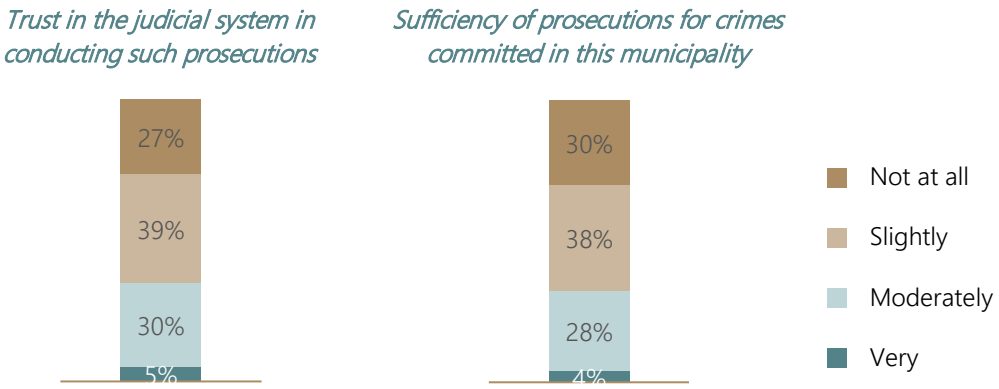
3.3 TRUST IN DOMESTIC WAR CRIMES TRIALS IS LIMITED BY CONCERNS ABOUT FAIRNESS, BIAS, AND CORRUPTION

TRUST AND LOCAL RELEVANCE

The previous section showed that public awareness of domestic war crimes prosecutions remains limited. Low awareness of domestic trials, in turn, can undermine public confidence in these processes, as people are less likely to trust what they do not understand or know about, though lack of awareness is only one of several factors shaping perceptions of fairness and legitimacy.

When asked how much they trust the judicial system in conducting domestic war crimes prosecutions, only 5% indicate a high level of trust, while 30% express moderate trust. The majority either trust the system only slightly (39%) or have no trust at all (27%). Only 22% of Serb respondents express very or moderate trust, compared to 38% of Croat and 43% of Bosniak respondents. Serb respondents are also most likely to say they have no trust at all (40%). This limited trust may be related in part to a perceived lack of focus on crimes committed locally. Only 4% of respondents say that domestic prosecutions focus sufficiently on crimes committed in their municipality "very much so." Many say the focus is moderate (28%) or slight (38%), while 30% say prosecutions do not focus on local crimes at all.

Figure 44: Perception of domestic war crimes trials - National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show the same broad skepticism, but also important local variation. Levels of trust are especially low in Rogatica and Goražde, where almost no respondents express high or even moderate trust in the judicial system. In Rogatica, 86% say they do not trust the system at all, and in Goražde, 76% say the same. In contrast, Čapljina, Busovača, and Stolac show higher levels of moderate trust, ranging from 32% to 48%, suggesting somewhat greater, though still measured, public confidence in these locations. However, in all municipalities, those expressing very high trust remain a minority.

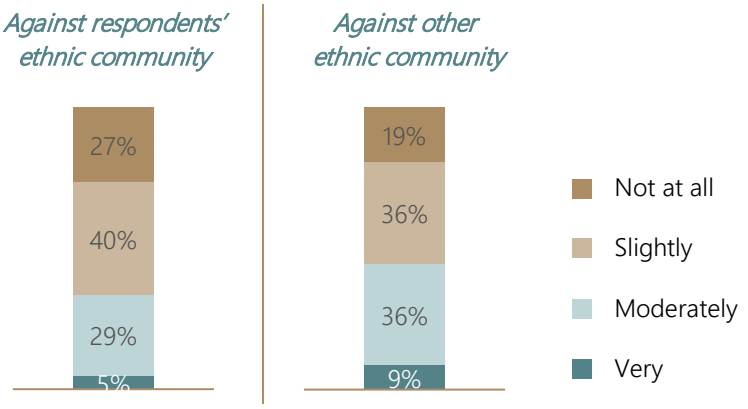
Across municipalities, skepticism appears closely tied to perceived gaps in local accountability. In Rogatica and Goražde, more than half of respondents say domestic prosecutions do not focus on crimes committed in their municipality at all, while a large share in Bratunac and Prijedor also report little local focus. Čapljina and Stolac stand out for somewhat more favorable views, with higher proportions perceiving at least moderate focus on local crimes.

FAIRNESS OF PROSECUTIONS

The lack of trust is also reflected in perceptions of fairness. When respondents assess prosecutions for crimes committed against their own ethnic community during the war, only 5% believe these prosecutions are very fair, while 29% say they are moderately fair. A larger share describes them as only slightly fair (40%), and 27% say they are not fair at all. Serb respondents are also more likely to perceive unfairness in the focus of domestic prosecutions. Forty one percent say prosecutions are not at all fair in relation to crimes committed against their own ethnic community, compared to 20% of Croat and 19% of Bosniak respondents.

Perceptions are somewhat less negative, though still mixed, when respondents consider whether prosecutions are fairly focused on crimes committed against other ethnic communities. Nine percent believe the focus is very fair, while 36% say it is moderately fair. However, a combined 55% say the focus is either slightly fair or not fair at all. Serb respondents are also more likely to say prosecutions are not at all fair in relation to crimes committed against other ethnic communities, at 31%, compared to 18% among Croats and 12% among Bosniaks, reflecting the overall lower trust in justice among this group.

Figure 45: Perception of fairness of domestic war crimes trials - National survey (% of respondents)

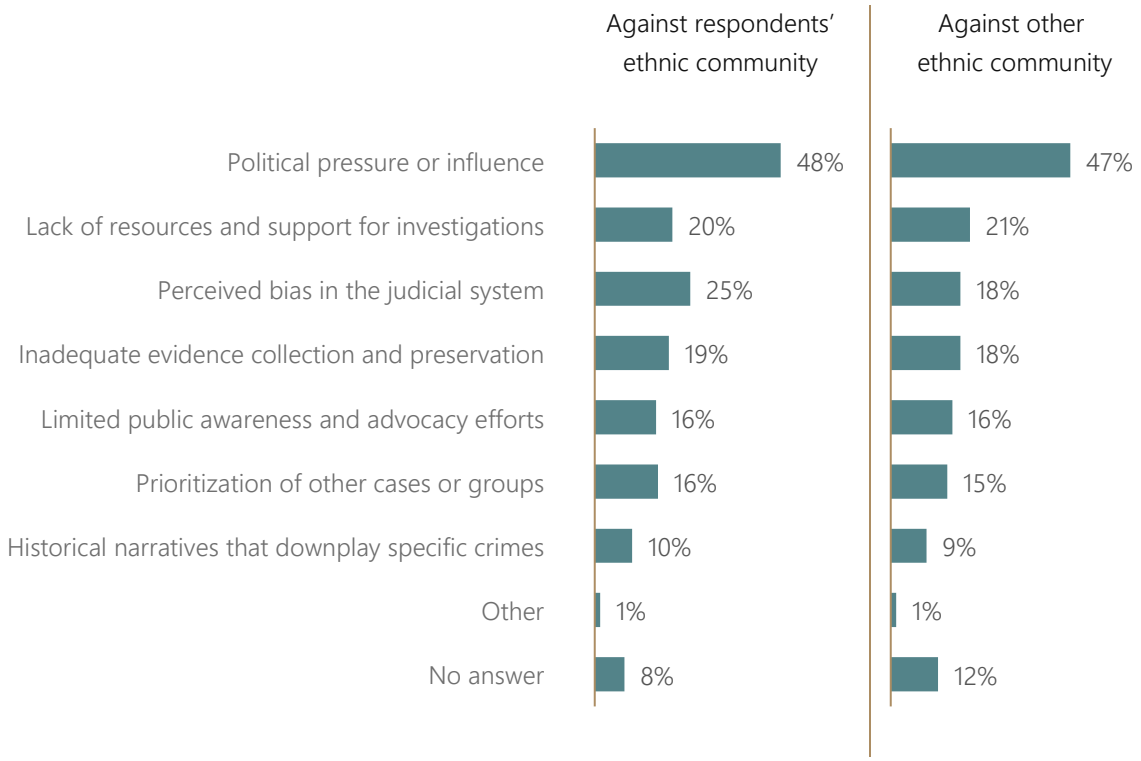


The municipality data show strong geographic differences. In Rogatica and Goražde, majorities believe prosecutions for crimes committed against their own ethnic community are not fair at all, 59% and 63% respectively. In contrast, Stolac and Čapljina report much lower levels of perceived unfairness. Moderate or slight perceptions of fairness generally dominate in the remaining municipalities, with very few respondents anywhere believing prosecutions are fully fair.

When asked what may be unfair about trials involving crimes against their own ethnic group or others, respondents most often point to political pressure or influence (48%). Other concerns include perceived bias in the judicial system, lack of resources and support, inadequate evidence collection, and other systemic or societal challenges.

Across municipalities, political pressure and influence are especially prominent in Bratunac, where they are cited by 76% in relation to trials involving respondents' own group and 82% in relation to trials involving other ethnic groups. This explanation is also frequently cited in Busovača and Velika Kladuša. In Čapljina, lack of resources and support, inadequate evidence collection, and prioritization of other cases or groups are cited more often than in other municipalities. Stolac also stands out for high reporting of resource issues and inadequate evidence.

Figure 46: Causes of perceived lack of fairness - National survey (% of respondents)

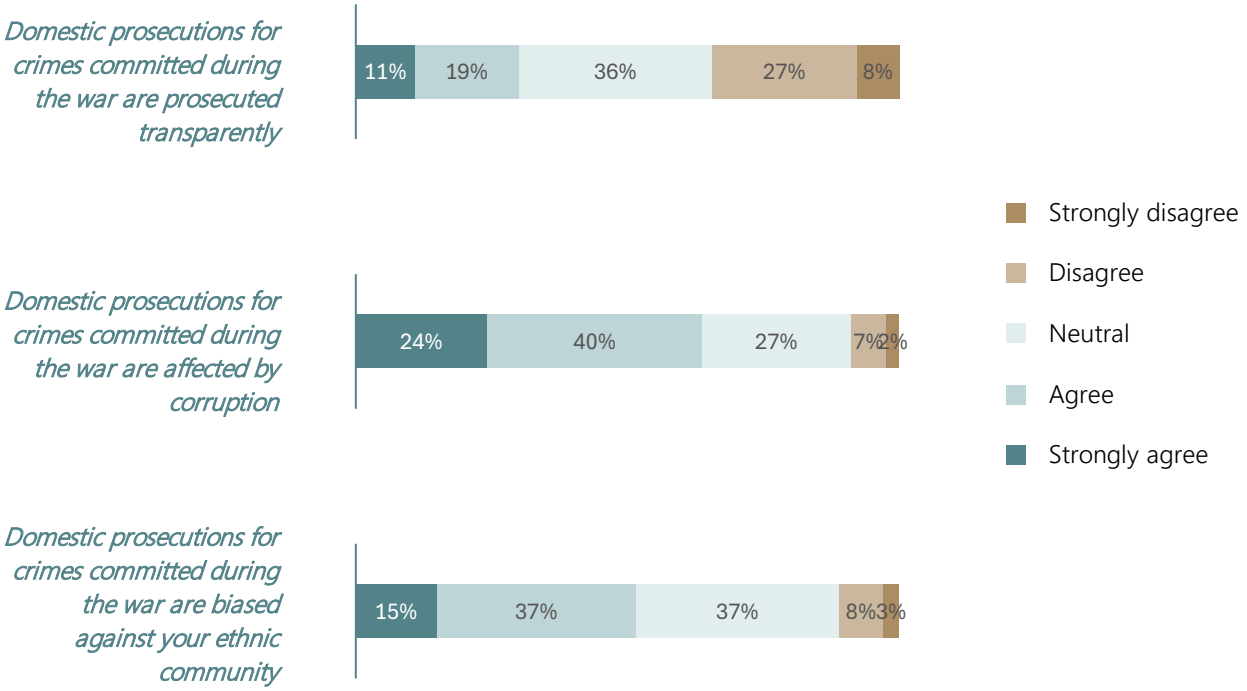


TRANSPARENCY, CORRUPTION AND BIAS

The survey also explored perceptions of transparency and integrity in domestic war crimes prosecutions. When asked whether domestic prosecutions are conducted transparently, only 11% strongly agree and 19% agree. The largest share, 36%, is undecided, while 35% disagree. These results suggest that few respondents see the process as clearly transparent, while many either doubt transparency or are unsure.

Concerns about corruption are more pronounced. Most participants agree that domestic prosecutions are affected by corruption, including 24% who strongly agree and 40% who agree. Only 9% disagree, while 27% are undecided. Perceived bias is also widespread. Over half of respondents either strongly agree (15%) or agree (37%) that prosecutions for crimes committed during the war are biased against their ethnic community. Another 37% are undecided, and only 11% disagree.

Figure 47: Perception of transparency, corruption and bias of domestic war crimes trials
National survey (% of respondents)



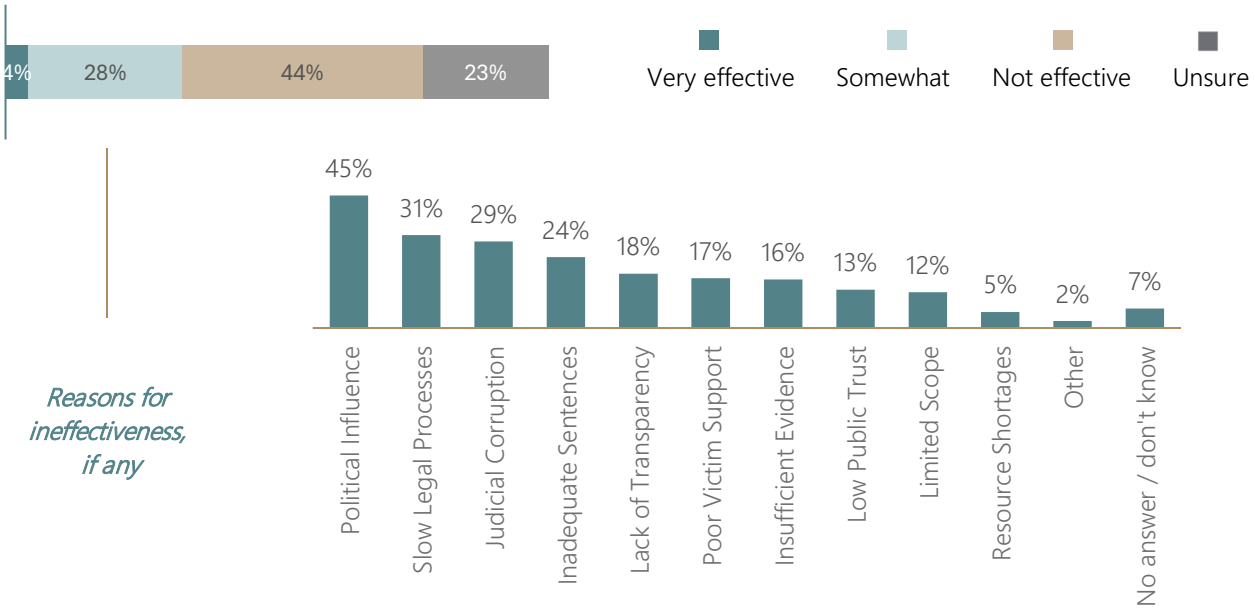
Municipality findings again show substantial variation. Perceptions of transparency are weak in most municipalities, with only a small share strongly agreeing that prosecutions are transparent. Disagreement is particularly high in Bratunac, Prijedor, and Rogatica, where 34% to 66% disagree and 13% to 23% strongly disagree. By contrast, Busovača and Čapljina show higher percentages of agreement or indecision, while Velika Kladuša stands out for relatively more positive views. Corruption is perceived as widespread almost everywhere. Most respondents strongly agree or agree that domestic prosecutions for crimes committed during the war are affected by corruption, especially in Bratunac, Prijedor, Rogatica, and Velika Kladuša. Bias against respondents' own ethnic community is also a consistent concern across most municipalities. Bratunac, Rogatica, and Velika Kladuša have the highest percentage of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing that domestic prosecutions are biased against their ethnic community, while Čapljina and Stolac show somewhat lower concern and higher rates of undecided responses. Busovača is distinct in having the highest rate of undecided respondents on this issue, at 64%.

3.4 TRIAL EFFECTIVENESS IS QUESTIONED, BUT DEMAND FOR MORE PROSECUTION REMAINS

EFFECTIVENESS OF WAR CRIMES TRIALS

The skepticism about the fairness and integrity of domestic war crimes trials extends to doubts about their effectiveness in delivering justice and improving inter-ethnic relations. Most people view these trials as ineffective or only somewhat effective: 4% of respondents rate domestic trials as very effective, while 28% consider them somewhat effective. In contrast, 44% think the trials are not effective, and 23% are unsure. Dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of domestic trials is most frequently attributed to political influence (45%), the slowness of legal processes (31%), and judicial corruption (29%). Inadequate sentences (24%), lack of transparency (18%), poor victim support (17%), and insufficient evidence (16%) are also identified as significant issues. Some respondents see the scope of trials as too limited (12%), while low public trust (13%) and resource shortages (5%) are mentioned less frequently. Reflecting data on trust and fairness, Serb respondents are the least likely to see trials as very or somewhat effective (19%) compared to Bosniak (40%) and Croat (35%) respondents.

Figure 48: Perception of effectiveness of domestic war crimes trials – national survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show important variations in how domestic war crimes trials are perceived. In Bratunac and Rogatica, there is almost no perception of trials being effective, with 0% rating them as very effective and only 6% and 4% respectively considering them somewhat effective. By contrast, Stolac and Velika Kladuša report the highest shares of somewhat effective responses, at 44% and 39%, and modestly higher rates of very effective responses, at 4%. The percentage of respondents marking trials as not effective is especially high in Rogatica (56%) and Čapljina (58%), while Busovača, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša show more even splits between not effective and somewhat effective responses. When exploring the reasons for dissatisfaction, political influence is consistently the leading reason. It is especially pronounced in Velika Kladuša (66%) and Busovača (55%), compared to only 14% in Čapljina. Busovača, Čapljina, Stolac, and Velika Kladuša also record high complaints about slow legal processes and inadequate sentences. Stolac and Velika Kladuša stand out for concerns over judicial corruption, at 32% and 54%, insufficient evidence, at 40% and

24%, and poor victim support, at 41% and 37%. Concerns about the limited scope of trials are most common in Čapljina and Stolac, both above 30%, while this issue is rarely mentioned in Bratunac (1%). Low public trust is particularly high in Velika Kladuša (28%) but much less frequently cited elsewhere.

Focus group participants across Brčko, Prijedor, and Stolac also reflected on the role of formal justice mechanisms, both international and domestic. While they recognized that many trials had been conducted, they were generally skeptical about the extent to which legal processes had contributed to reconciliation. The shared view was that criminal justice processes are important but have not fulfilled their intended role. Trials were seen as necessary but insufficient: they established legal responsibility in some cases, but did little to encourage empathy, mutual recognition, or societal healing.

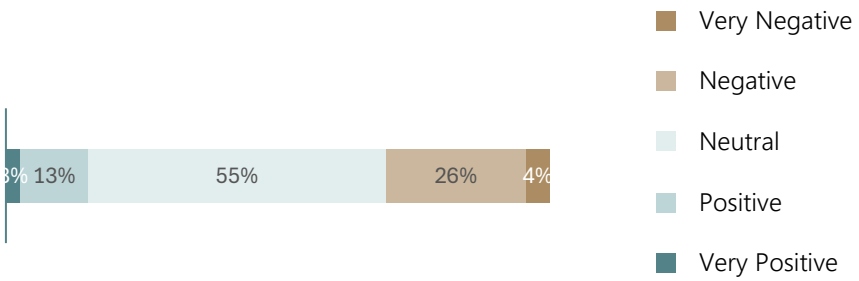
In Prijedor, where mass crimes and detention camps were a defining feature of the war, participants expressed frustration with the slow and incomplete prosecution of perpetrators. They noted that some trials had taken place at state and international levels, but that the large number of unresolved cases, especially those related to mass graves and missing persons, created a sense that justice was delayed or denied.

> *"I know that there were processes against those people who participated in those crimes, but whether they gave any information or not, I don't know. But if it has not been found until now, the question is whether anything will ever be found..." (Prijedor participant)*[29]

EFFECTS ON INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Given the focus of the survey, respondents were also asked to assess the impact of domestic prosecutions on inter-ethnic relations. Domestic trials in Bosnia and Herzegovina were intended not only to deliver justice for war crimes, but also to contribute to reconciliation and rebuild trust among ethnic groups after the conflict. However, the results show that the majority of respondents (55%) describe the impact as neutral. Meanwhile, 26% say the effect is negative and 4% very negative, compared to 13% who view the impact as positive and just 3% who see it as very positive.

Figure 49: Impact of domestic war crimes trials on inter-ethnic relations
National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show that the perceived impact of prosecutions on inter-ethnic relations is most frequently seen as neutral. Neutral views are especially common in Busovača (69%), Čapljina (61%), and Goražde (61%). Negative and very negative views are especially high in Bratunac and Prijedor, both with combined scores above 50%. By contrast, only small minorities in Čapljina and Busovača feel prosecutions have had a negative impact. Positive perceptions are more frequently reported in Čapljina (18%) and in both Stolac and Velika Kladuša (21%) but remain low overall.

Focus group participants similarly questioned whether trials had translated into broader social recognition or healing. In Brčko, respondents noted that while trials and verdicts exist, their meaning is often undermined by political and media narratives that minimize crimes or reinterpret them through nationalist frames.

> *"...we all know that there were trials and verdicts. However, again politics and the media do their work — in one community it is minimized, in another it is glorified, and so it goes in circles. So, although the trials exist, I think justice has not really taken root among people." (Brčko participant)*[30]

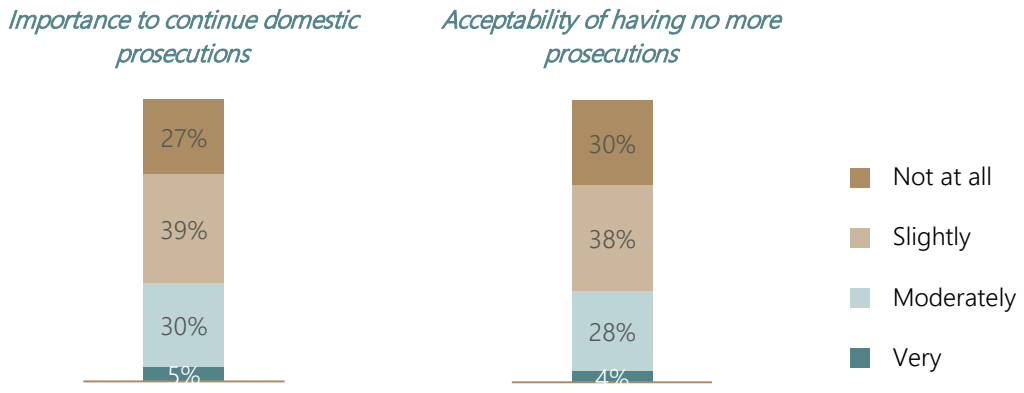
In Stolac, participants did not focus extensively on the details of trials themselves but reflected more broadly on how justice feels distant and abstract, with limited impact on everyday relations. Respondents pointed to persistent structural inequalities, including segregated schooling and unequal opportunities in public employment, as part of the reason why formal judicial processes alone cannot create reconciliation.

> *"...but I think it is all up to politics... many people disappeared and many suffered, from all nations, but here even after 30 years nothing has been done about it..." (Stolac participant)* [31]

CONTINUED PROSECUTIONS AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

Although the effectiveness and impact of trials are questioned, the importance of continuing prosecutions remains high. A combined 69% believe it is either very important (35%) or moderately important (34%) to continue domestic prosecutions for alleged perpetrators. Only 19% say this is "slightly important", while 12% consider it not important at all. Similarly, when asked whether ending such prosecutions would be acceptable, 39% find this not at all acceptable, while 28% say it would be slightly acceptable. Only 19% would moderately accept ending prosecutions, and 15% consider ending prosecutions very acceptable. Support for continued prosecutions is strongest among Bosniak respondents. Forty six percent of Bosniak respondents say continuing domestic prosecutions is very important, compared to 23% of Serb and 18% of Croat respondents. Serb respondents are more likely than others to say continued prosecutions are not important at all (23%), while Croat respondents are more likely to describe them as slightly or moderately important.

Figure 50: Importance of war crimes trials - National survey (% of respondents)

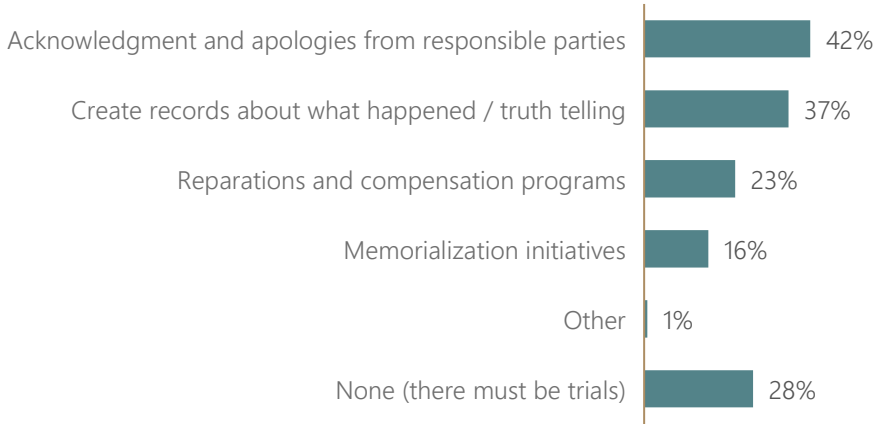


There are differences across municipalities in the importance attached to continuing prosecutions. Bratunac stands out as the most insistent, with 76% rating continued prosecutions as very important, followed by Velika Kladuša at 61%. In contrast, Čapljina and Stolac show far less demand for continued prosecutions as very important, at 3% and 11%, and much higher shares saying this is only slightly important, at 52% and 49% respectively. Rogatica and Čapljina also have relatively high not at all important responses, reflecting less perceived need for ongoing trials in those places.

When asked if ending prosecutions would be acceptable, Bratunac and Velika Kladuša are the firmest in opposition: 54% and 53% respectively say it would not be acceptable at all. In Čapljina, only 9% hold this view, and a majority (55%) would find the end of prosecutions at least slightly acceptable.

If prosecutions do not continue, many respondents support alternative measures. The leading alternative is acknowledgment and apologies from responsible parties, supported by 42%. Truth-telling initiatives and creating records about what happened receive 37% support. Reparations and compensation programs are favored by 23%, while 16% support memorialization initiatives. Notably, 28% oppose all alternatives, saying that there must be trials.

Figure 51: Alternative to trials if there is no more prosecution - National survey (% of respondents)



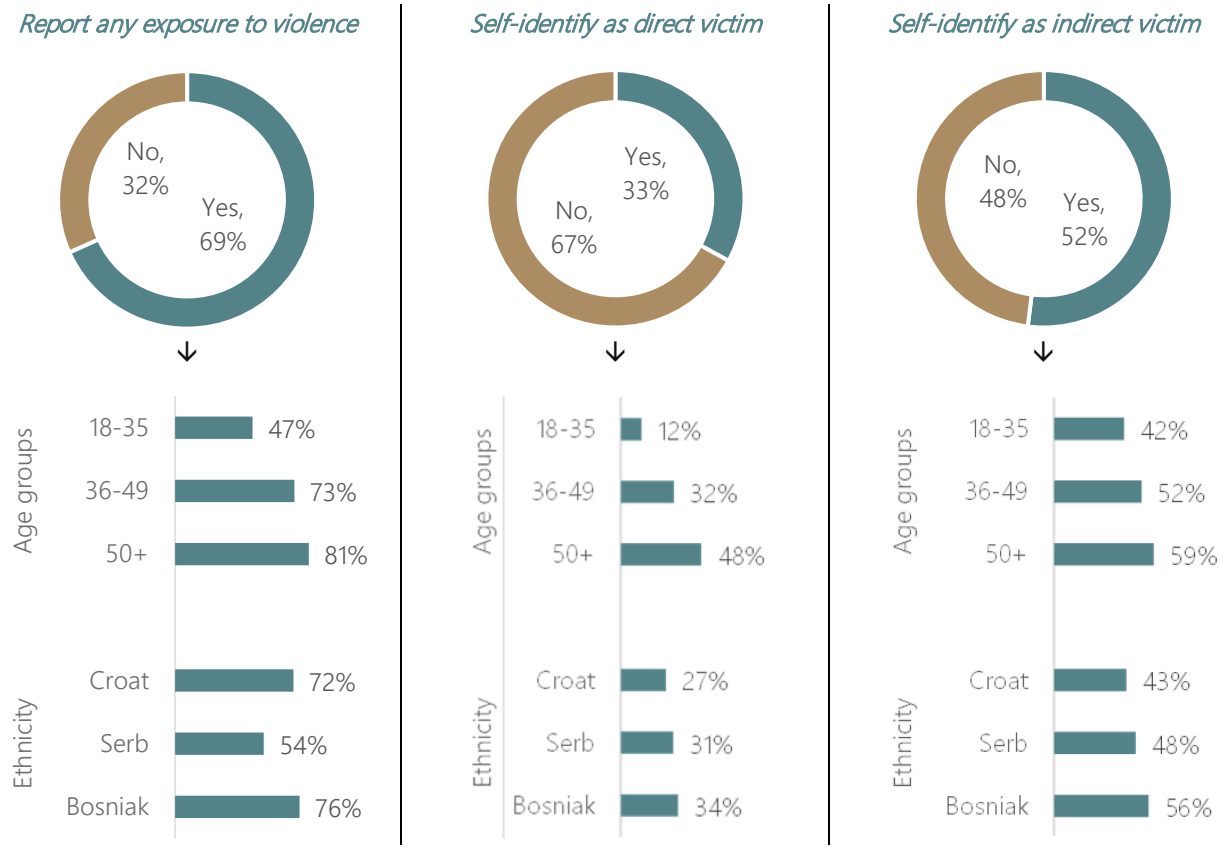
Attitudes toward alternatives reveal further divergence across municipalities. In Busovača and Velika Kladuša, there is substantial support for acknowledgment and apologies, at 61% and 55%, and for creating historical records, at 46% and 51%. Reparations and compensation receive the most support in Stolac (64%) and Čapljina (57%), and memorialization initiatives also rank high in both municipalities. On the other hand, in Bratunac, 47% insist that there must be trials rather than alternatives. In Čapljina, Goražde, and Stolac, only 4% to 5% refuse alternatives, suggesting greater openness in those municipalities to non-prosecutorial measures if trials cannot continue.

3.5 VICTIM RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT REMAIN INSUFFICIENT AND UNEVEN

VICTIMHOOD AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

As noted in the discussion of justice, one of the reasons many respondents do not believe that justice has been achieved is the lack of recognition of victims. This widespread sentiment underscores the importance of understanding how victimhood is experienced and addressed across Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the challenges that remain in providing adequate support and fostering reconciliation. A large majority of citizens report direct or indirect exposure to wartime violence, yet few feel that victim needs are being adequately recognized or addressed. During the survey, a large majority of respondents (69%) reported some form of exposure to violence resulting from the war, including physical injury, loss of a loved one, forced displacement, property damage, and other exposures. Experience of violence resulting from the war also included psychological trauma or discrimination and threats that may have occurred after the war. About one third of participants self-identified as direct victims (33%) or indirect victims through the experience of their families (52%). Exposure and victim identification varied by age and ethnicity. Older respondents were much more likely to identify as direct victims, and they also reported higher overall exposure. These exposure figures should be interpreted broadly, as they include not only wartime events but also post-war experiences such as threats, discrimination, and psychological trauma.

Figure 52: Victims' status- National survey (% of respondents)



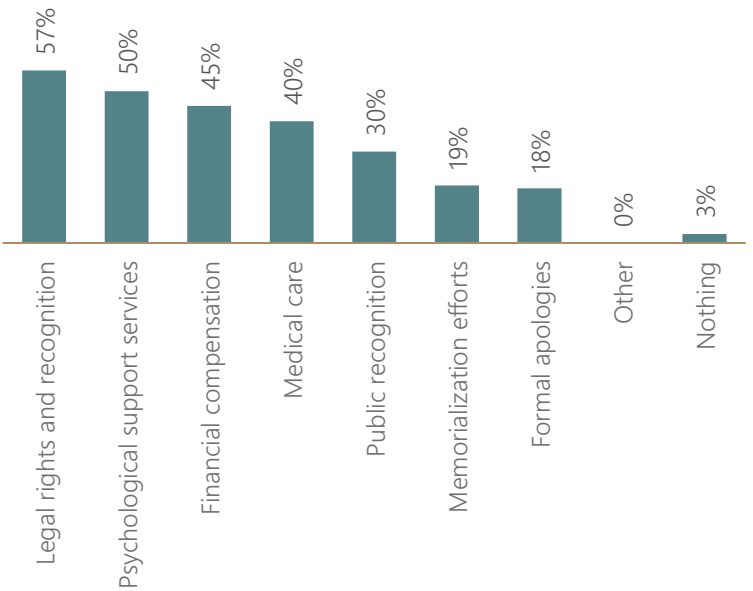
At the same time, the survey results show little difference between victims and non-victims in general attitudes toward social cohesion and justice. This may reflect the extent to which wars shape the perspectives of society more broadly, not only victims. The high levels of direct and indirect victimhood may also help explain the interest in mechanisms for support and recognition.

The municipality surveys show that exposure to wartime violence differs sharply across locations. In Bratunac, nearly all respondents (99%) report some form of war-related violence or loss, while in Čapljina (29%) and Rogatica (19%), reported exposure is much lower. The sense of personal victimhood is similarly uneven: while an overwhelming 93% in Bratunac and 64% in Goražde see themselves as direct victims, in Čapljina only 6% do. Rates of indirect victimization through family experience also vary, from 91% in Bratunac to just 8% in Čapljina. These patterns help explain different levels of interest in support and recognition, as communities with higher reported victimization tend to emphasize these needs more strongly.

NEEDS OF VICTIMS AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

When considering the current needs of victims, legal rights and recognition are cited as the most important by 57% of respondents, reflecting a desire not only for material assistance but also for formal acknowledgment of victim status. Psychological support is also highly prioritized (50%), indicating recognition of the long-term mental health effects of conflict. Financial compensation (45%) and medical care (40%) follow, underscoring the ongoing economic and health challenges many survivors face. Public recognition and memorialization, while less frequently selected, at 30% and 19% respectively, still have a role for a substantial minority. Only a very small number (3%) believe nothing should be provided.

Figure 53: Measures for victims - National survey (% of respondents)



The municipality surveys show that priorities differ across local contexts. Legal rights and recognition rank highest in several places, including Busovača (57%) and Velika Kladuša (69%). Psychological support services are prioritized in Busovača (59%), Rogatica (55%), and Velika Kladuša (64%). Financial compensation is much less important in Čapljina (7%) and Stolac (11%) than in Busovača (53%) and Rogatica (48%). In Stolac (52%) and Rogatica (44%), public recognition and medical care are also highly valued. Memorialization and formal apologies have limited support

overall but are somewhat more emphasized in Čapljina and Stolac, where symbolic gestures as forms of justice are more likely to be mentioned.

Despite the clear needs expressed by respondents, only 6% rate the current government support system for war victims as very adequate. Most are critical: 39% judge support as slightly adequate and 28% not at all adequate. This widespread dissatisfaction reflects a persistent sense that the state is falling short of meeting post-war needs and likely fuels the sense that justice has not been achieved.

The dissatisfaction with the response system may also explain why few respondents believe that victim support has substantially contributed to improving inter-ethnic relations. Only 6% see the contribution as substantial, while most see the impact as only slight (39%) or nonexistent (28%). In addition, many respondents (46%) see ethnic identity as playing a moderate to strong role in how well victims are served, raising concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of victim support programs. Serb respondents are most dissatisfied with current government support for war victims, with 41% rating it not at all adequate, compared to 23% of Bosniak and 17% of Croat respondents. Serb respondents are also most likely to say that victim support has not contributed at all to improving relations across ethnic groups (38%).

Figure 54: Perception of support for victims - National survey (% of respondents)



Across municipalities, satisfaction with government support for victims is low, but the intensity of dissatisfaction varies. In Goražde and Prijedor, about 42% rate current government support as not at all adequate, while in Rogatica this rises to 47%. In Čapljina, dissatisfaction is expressed differently: 48% rate support as only slightly adequate, while just 7% say it is not at all adequate. When it comes to whether government support has aided inter-ethnic relations, attitudes are also mixed. In most places, only a negligible proportion believes the impact has been very positive. For example, just 1% in Bratunac, Prijedor, Rogatica, and Busovača hold this view, compared to 7% in Velika Kladuša. Moderate contributions are most widely reported in Busovača (45%), Stolac (44%), and Čapljina (30%), while large shares across municipalities say the contribution is slight or inexistent, especially in Rogatica, where 40% say not at all, and Prijedor, where 45% say the same. Perceptions of fairness are also uneven. In most municipalities, many respondents see ethnic identity as having at least a moderate influence on victim support. In Rogatica, however, 49% believe ethnic identity makes no difference. In Velika Kladuša, 22% say ethnic identity very strongly affects support, a much higher rate than in most other sites.

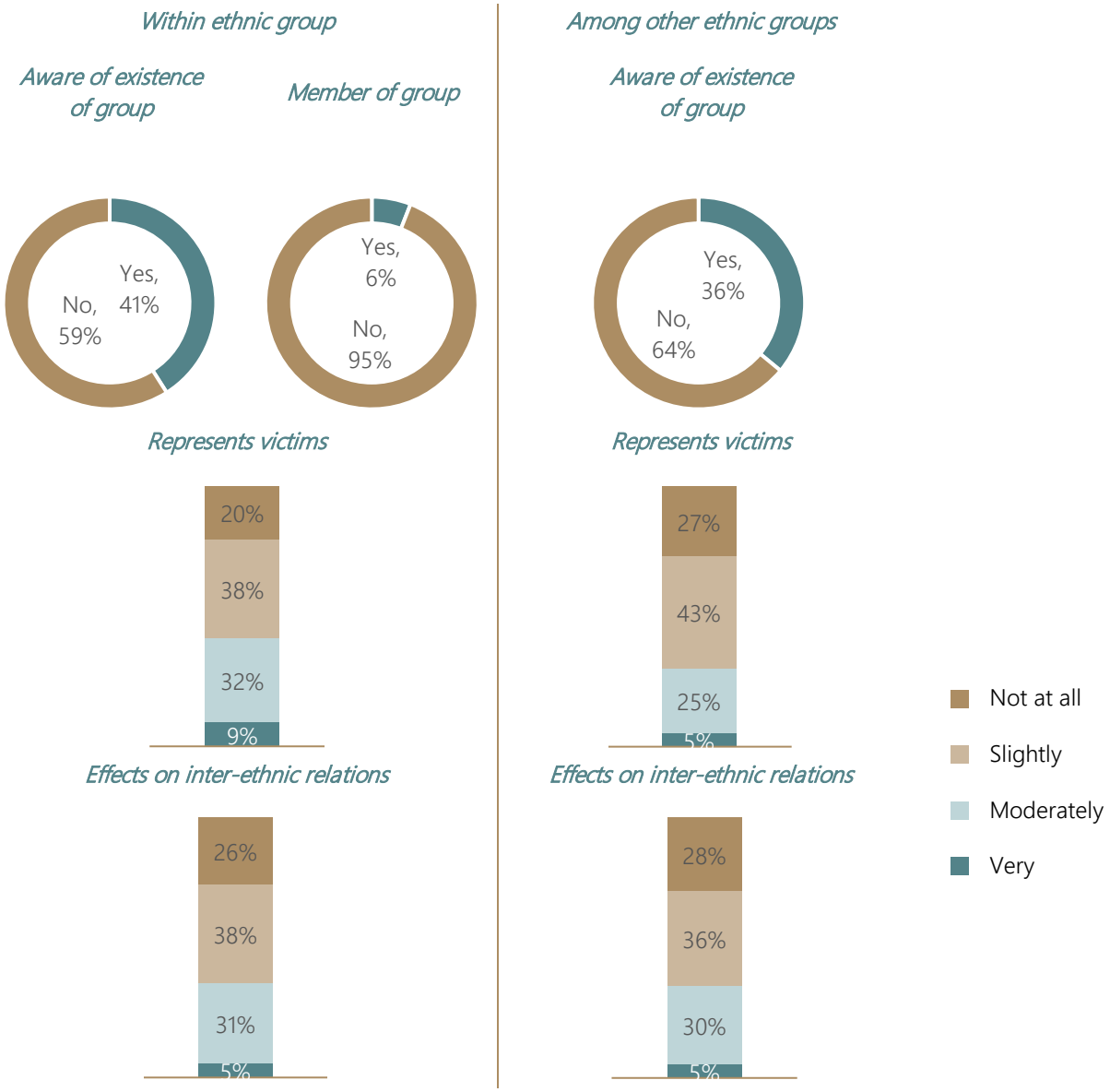
VICTIMS GROUPS AND REPRESENTATION

Less than half of respondents are aware of the existence of victims' groups within their own ethnic community (41%) or other ethnic communities (36%), and just 6% are members of such groups. These groups are often viewed with

skepticism. Only a small proportion believe that existing victim's groups accurately represent the interests of those they claim to serve. Just 9% think their own community's victim's groups are very representative, with 32% rating them as moderately representative, while a significant share sees them as only slightly (38%) or not at all representative (20%).

This perception is even more negative toward groups from other ethnic communities. Just 5% believe those groups represent victims interests very well, and 27% believe they do not represent them at all. Similarly, the perceived impact of these groups on inter-ethnic relations is rarely seen as positive. Only 5% believe that victims groups, whether from their own or other communities, have been very effective in improving relations among ethnic groups. Rather, over a quarter of respondents, 26% to 28%, feel these groups have made no contribution toward improving inter-ethnic relations.

Figure 55: Awareness, membership and perception of victims' groups - National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality results again show considerable variation. Most respondents in Bratunac (91%) are aware of local victims' groups, but awareness is much lower in Čapljina (9%), Rogatica (31%), and Busovača (37%). Membership remains low across all areas. Skepticism toward the effectiveness of these groups is widespread. In Rogatica, 55% feel their community's victims' groups do not represent victims at all, while in Goražde and Prijedor, one quarter express this view. Stolac and Busovača provide exceptions, where over 40% rate their groups as moderately representative, and Velika Kladuša has a notable share, 13%, considering their groups very representative. The perceived contribution of victims' groups to inter-ethnic relations is largely neutral or negative. Over half of respondents in Rogatica (54%) and Goražde (47%) see no positive contribution, whereas in Busovača and Stolac, around one third believe these groups have contributed moderately. Awareness of victims' groups from other ethnic communities is most pronounced in Bratunac (86%), but very low elsewhere, especially in Goražde (5%) and Rogatica (7%). Consistently, these groups are not seen as effectively representing victim's needs, with only 9% in Velika Kladuša and lower numbers elsewhere seeing such groups as very representative. Most often, views fall into slightly representative or not at all, particularly in Rogatica and Goražde.

Focus group discussions reinforce the importance of recognition. Across the selected municipalities, the issue of victims' recognition was a common theme, often seen as essential to improve inter-ethnic relations. Many participants expressed that the suffering of victims and their families has not been properly acknowledged, and that the lack of a shared or inclusive approach to memory perpetuates divisions and mistrust. The question of reparations, whether material or symbolic, was raised as an unresolved need that remains central to healing. Generally, participants emphasized that justice is not only about trials and verdicts, but also about acknowledgment, memory, and reparations.

In Prijedor, recognition was closely tied to the memory of atrocities committed in 1992. Participants emphasized the absence of a memorial for murdered children and pointed to controversies around commemorations such as White Armband Day. They described how local authorities have resisted inclusive remembrance, instead allowing nationalist narratives to dominate public space. This selective acknowledgment was seen as compounding the pain of survivors and their families, and as evidence that political actors actively avoid dealing with the past.

> *"…for more than a decade I have been trying to have a monument built for the murdered children of Prijedor. Until today we have not succeeded, we came to the point where the mayor should say whether it will go ahead or not, but that same man absolutely does not want to talk…" (Prijedor participant)*[32]

In Brčko, participants stressed that victims remain a deeply sensitive issue, not because they are forgotten, but because their memory is often instrumentalized rather than genuinely honored. One participant described how politicians continue to use victims for political gain, preventing acknowledgment from becoming a foundation for reconciliation and instead using recognition to drive divides.

> *"As long as these politicians keep scoring points on those victims and on those war participants. I don't see that it will ever change, at least not in these generations." (Brčko participant)*[33]

In Stolac, the theme of marginalization of victims was particularly pronounced. Respondents described how commemorations are often one-sided and shaped by political or religious interests. Families who lost loved ones feel excluded from public recognition, with little opportunity for collective mourning that could bring communities together. For some, this reinforced the perception that victims' pain is not equally valued. Participants stressed that the absence of inclusive remembrance and reparations undermines trust and leaves communities trapped in the past.

> *"…when something is commemorated, some date or gathering or something, then politics—since those associations are financed by politics—then they must, for the funds they receive, make some statement. And then they come out with that statement, whether it's the H or the B component…" (Stolac participant)* [34]

3.6 TRUTH REMAINS CONTESTED BUT DIALOGUE, AND TRUTH-SEEKING ARE SUPPORTED

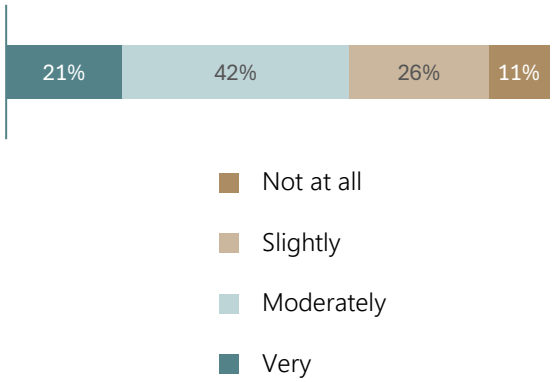
UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENTS OF THE 1990S

The previous sections show that uncovering and acknowledging past events is very much part of how many respondents define justice and is one of the reasons many feel justice has not been achieved. While most respondents rate their understanding of the events of the 1990s as moderately (42%) or very (21%) high, over a third report having little (26%) or no understanding (11%).

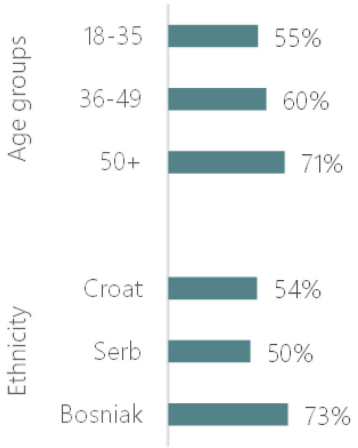
Fewer young adults aged 18-35 reported moderate to very good understanding of the events of the 1990s compared to older generations. Across ethnic groups, Bosniak most frequently reported moderate to very good understanding of these events. Across municipalities, self-assessed understanding varies considerably. In Velika Kladuša, 26% describe their understanding as very strong and 43% as moderate. Bratunac, Rogatica, and Goražde have much lower rates of strong understanding, at 4%, 0%, and 6% respectively, and higher shares reporting little or no understanding. Rogatica stands out with 62% reporting no understanding at all.

Figure 56: Understanding of the events of the 1990s – national survey (% of respondents)

Overall understanding (national survey)

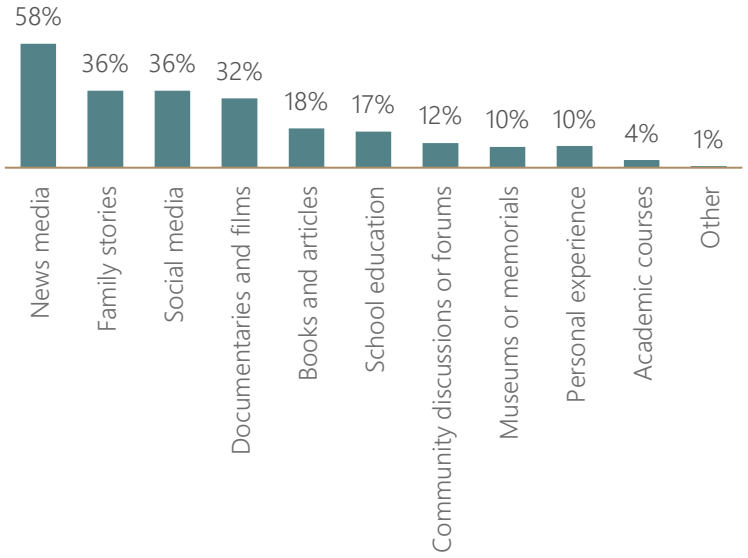


Moderate to very good understanding of the events of the 1990s by demographic groups



The most common sources of information are news media (58%), social media (36%), family stories (36%), and documentaries and films (32%). Books and articles inform 18%, while school education and academic courses play a more limited role, at 17% and 4% respectively. A smaller share cites personal experience (10%). These findings suggest that public understanding of the past is shaped more by media, families, and informal sources than by formal education or academic study. Sources of information also differ locally. In Busovača, Prijedor, and Velika Kladuša, school education plays a more notable role, with 17%, 11%, and 34% respectively citing it, while in Rogatica and Bratunac only 1% do. News media is the dominant source overall, especially in Rogatica (68%) and Busovača (68%). Family stories are most important in Busovača (41%) and Prijedor (36%). Stolac (51%) and Velika Kladuša (35%) stand out for their use of books and articles, while Čapljina relies heavily on documentaries and films (47%). Social media remains highly influential in Čapljina (44%) and Velika Kladuša (46%).

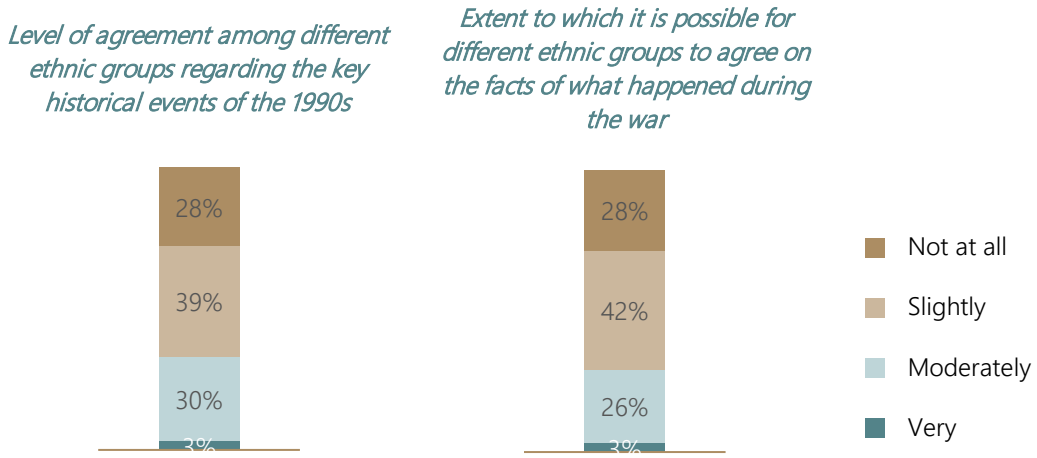
Figure 57: Sources of information about the events of the 1990s – national survey (% of respondents)



LIMITED AGREEMENT ON THE PAST

Respondents further acknowledge that agreement across ethnic groups remains limited. When asked about the level of agreement among different ethnic groups on what happened during the war, only 3% see strong agreement and 30% see moderate agreement. By contrast, 39% see little agreement and 28% say there is no agreement at all. A similar sense of division appears when respondents are asked whether consensus could be reached in the future. Only 3% describe this as very possible and 26% as moderately possible, while 42% are only slightly optimistic and 28% believe it is not possible at all. Serb respondents are least likely to see agreement across ethnic groups on the events of the 1990s. Only 22% of Serb respondents say there is very or moderate agreement, compared to 42% of Croat and 39% of Bosniak respondents. Serb respondents are also most likely to believe that future agreement on the facts of the war is not possible at all (32%).

Figure 58: Perception of shared agreement on historical events - National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings show deep local differences. In Rogatica, 66% believe there is no agreement at all, while Busovača is more optimistic, with 49% saying there is moderate agreement. Slight agreement is most common in Bratunac (64%) and Čapljina (45%). There is similar variation in views about the possibility of future consensus. Rogatica remains the most pessimistic, with 63% saying agreement is not at all possible, while Busovača and Čapljina are more optimistic about at least some possibility for agreement.

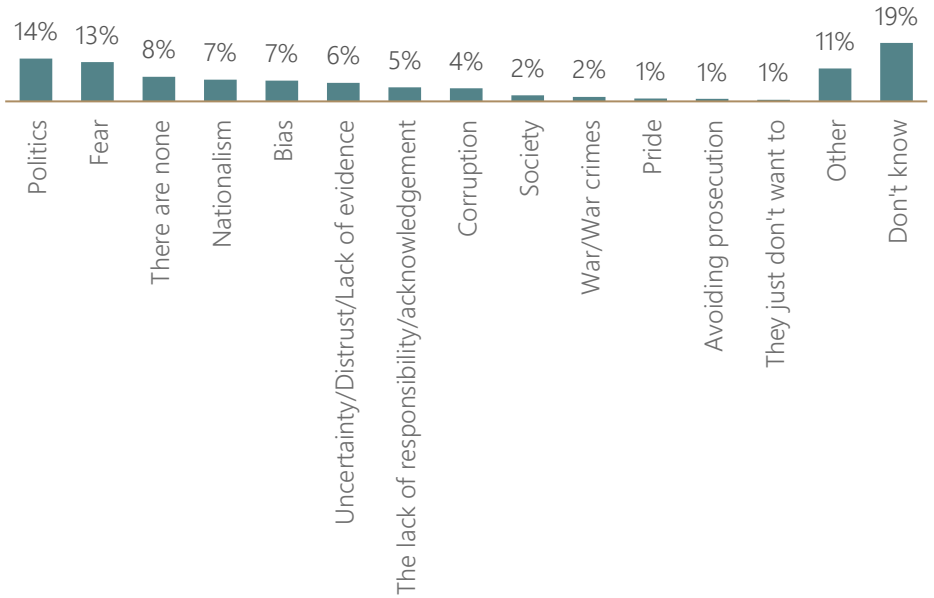
Focus group participants described the same challenge in more personal terms. Across Brčko, Prijedor, and Stolac, participants acknowledged that failure to build agreement on the events from the 1990s continues to shape mistrust, limit dialogue, and complicate efforts toward genuine coexistence. In Stolac, one participant summarized the difficulty of reaching a shared account directly: *"everyone has their own truth, even within one ethnic group, for example, if you ask ten Croats there are ten different truths, and it is the same with the Bosniaks, not to mention reaching agreement on one truth…"* (Stolac participant) [35]

Participants also pointed to the role of media and public discourse in reinforcing different narratives of the past. As one Brčko participant noted, "I don't know, there have been situations where three different media outlets report three different versions of the information" (Brčko participant).[36]

BARRIERS TO ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The lack of agreement is closely connected to barriers to publicly acknowledging crimes committed during the war. When asked about the greatest obstacles to acknowledging crimes committed against other groups, respondents cite a range of factors, including politics (14%), fear (13%), bias and nationalism (7% each), and distrust or lack of evidence (6%). Nineteen percent say they do not know and 11% cite other reasons, highlighting the complexity of the issue.

Figure 59: Greatest obstacle for all ethnic groups to publicly acknowledge crimes committed against other ethnic groups- National survey (% of respondents) – single answer

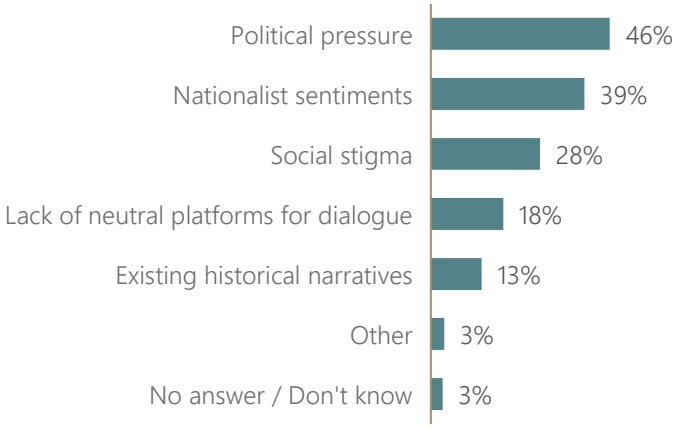


Municipality findings again show variation. Politics is especially seen as a barrier in Bratunac (23%), Busovača (26%), and Velika Kladuša (24%). Nationalism is cited most often in Stolac (31%), while Čapljina and Stolac stand out for high mentions of corruption, at 34% and 28%. Fear, uncertainty, and lack of evidence appear more often in places such as

Prijedor and Goražde. A significant portion in several municipalities, including Rogatica (69%) and Goražde (57%), respond "do not know."

Barriers are even clearer when respondents are asked about acknowledging crimes committed by one's own group. Political pressure is the most frequently mentioned obstacle (46%), followed by nationalist sentiments (39%) and social stigma (28%). A lack of neutral dialogue (18%) and entrenched historical narratives (13%) are also cited. These findings suggest that acknowledgment is not only a matter of knowledge, but also of social pressure, political context, and fear of how one's own community may respond.

Figure 60: Obstacles to publicly acknowledging crimes committed by one's own group- National survey (% of respondents) – multiple answers



At the municipality level, when asked about barriers to acknowledging crimes committed by one's own group, political pressure is prevalent in many areas, especially Bratunac (59%), Busovača (59%), Stolac (53%), and Velika Kladuša (55%). Nationalist sentiments are highest in Busovača and Velika Kladuša, both at 51%. Social stigma is especially high in Čapljina (57%) and Stolac (52%), and lack of dialogue platforms is also prominent in Čapljina (40%) and Stolac (49%).

Focus group discussions also reflected these barriers. Participants consistently identified the lack of open acknowledgment of wartime crimes as one of the deepest obstacles to reconciliation. While many agreed that ordinary people can live and work together, discussion of past atrocities remains highly sensitive and often avoided. In small towns such as Stolac, where victims and perpetrators families may live close to one another, participants described fear and silence as especially strong.

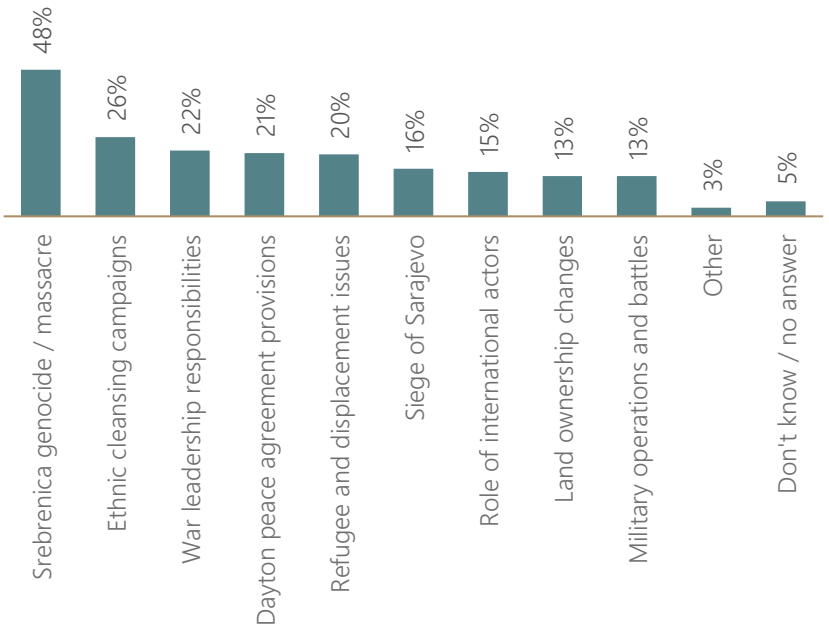
> *"…I think that everything would be found out very quickly, because those who know what happened won't speak unless they have some interest. Especially the older people, those who are already in their later years, they certainly won't [speak] because there is a great fear, fear of revenge against them or their descendants…" (Stolac participant)* [37]

Participants also described social pressure not to admit wrongdoing by one's own group. Acknowledgment may be interpreted as betrayal or disloyalty, encouraging silence or denial instead. As one Prijedor participant said, "*And whoever committed [a crime], and if they did commit it, that person will not admit it publicly. Honestly, I don't know why someone would deny something.*" (Prijedor participant)[38]

DISPUTED EVENTS AND SELECTIVE MEMORY

The difficulty of building agreement on facts appears to crystallize around specific events. The Srebrenica genocide is listed by 48% of respondents as the most controversial event, followed by ethnic cleansing campaigns (26%), war leadership responsibilities (22%), provisions from the Dayton Agreement (21%), and the siege of Sarajevo (16%). The roles of international actors, displacement issues, and land ownership are also seen as contested.

Figure 61: Most disputed events - National survey (% of respondents)



Disputed historical events differ by locality. The Srebrenica genocide is most often identified as disputed in Goražde (73%), Rogatica (69%), and Velika Kladuša (68%), but much less so in Čapljina (8%). Ethnic cleansing is a leading disputed topic in Stolac (50%), Čapljina (40%), and Velika Kladuša (38%), while the siege of Sarajevo is especially relevant in Stolac (37%) and Velika Kladuša (36%). Čapljina is notable for highlighting the Dayton Agreement, land ownership changes, and war leadership responsibilities.

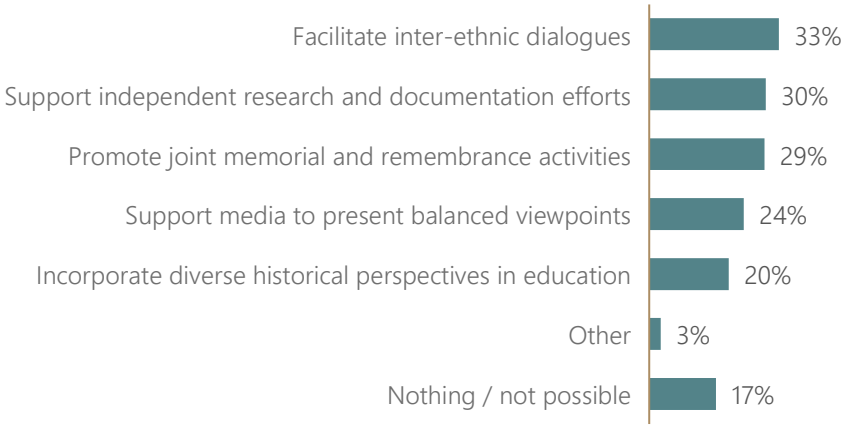
Focus group participants described how selective memory is reinforced through institutions, politics, media, and public space. In Prijedor, participants linked disputes over memory to memorialization and the lack of inclusive recognition of all victims. One participant described how monuments for some groups exist while victims from returnee Bosniak and Croat communities remain unrecognized, saying that this presents history "in a completely opposite way." In Stolac, participants linked selective memory to segregated social and educational structures, where young people inherit different accounts of the past depending on the community to which they belong.

DIALOGUE, TRUTH SEEKING AND MISSING PERSONS

Despite limited agreement and continued barriers to acknowledgment, many respondents identify possible ways forward. When asked how to build inter-ethnic consensus on the war, 33% recommend facilitating dialogue, 30% support independent research and documentation, and 29% support joint memorial activities. Another 24% advocate for more balanced media coverage, and 20% want diverse perspectives in education. Still, 17% believe nothing can be done.

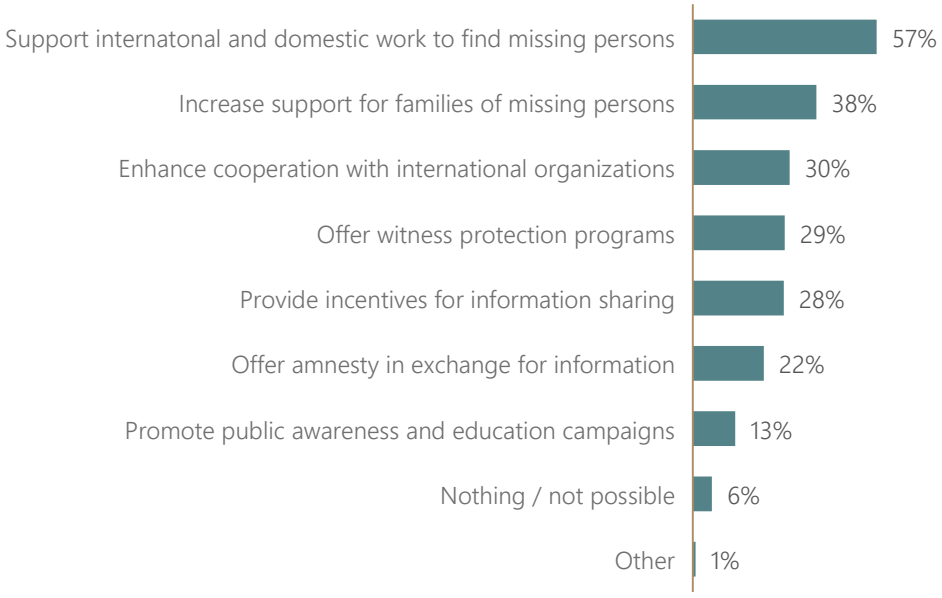
Municipality findings show different levels of openness to these approaches. Busovača and Velika Kladuša show greater openness to inter-ethnic dialogue, both at 44%. Promoting joint memorial activities is most prominent in Čapljina (55%), Stolac (57%), and Velika Kladuša (44%). There is significant support for independent research in Čapljina (59%), Stolac (50%), and Velika Kladuša (49%). However, skepticism is also high: 49% in Prijedor and 39% in Bratunac say nothing, or that it is not possible, will lead to consensus.

Figure 62: Measures to build agreement over historical events- National survey (% of respondents)



The issue of missing persons remains one of the most painful unresolved questions related to truth and acknowledgment. Nationally, 57% say it is essential to support organizations working to locate missing persons or their remains, while 38% call for increased support for affected families. Nearly one third support enhanced cooperation with international organizations (30%) and witness protection (29%). Financial incentives for information are supported by 28%, and amnesty for information by 22%. Only 6% see no way forward.

Figure 63: Measures to locate missing people or their remains- National survey (% of respondents)



Municipality findings again vary. Velika Kladuša (71%) and Busovača (49%) see the greatest value in supporting organizations dedicated to this task, while Čapljina stands out for preferring witness protection programs (54%) and providing incentives for information (50%). Amnesty is considered by 40% in Čapljina, while support for families and increased international cooperation are also seen across municipalities.

Focus group participants strongly reinforced the importance of truth seeking and missing persons. In Prijedor, the issue was especially central. Participants described the failure to locate and identify remains as preventing closure for families and perpetuating mistrust in the wider community.

> *"Almost 30 years have passed, and the mortal remains are still being searched for. People are dying without finding their children. That is the greatest wound and the greatest injustice." (Prijedor participant)*[39]

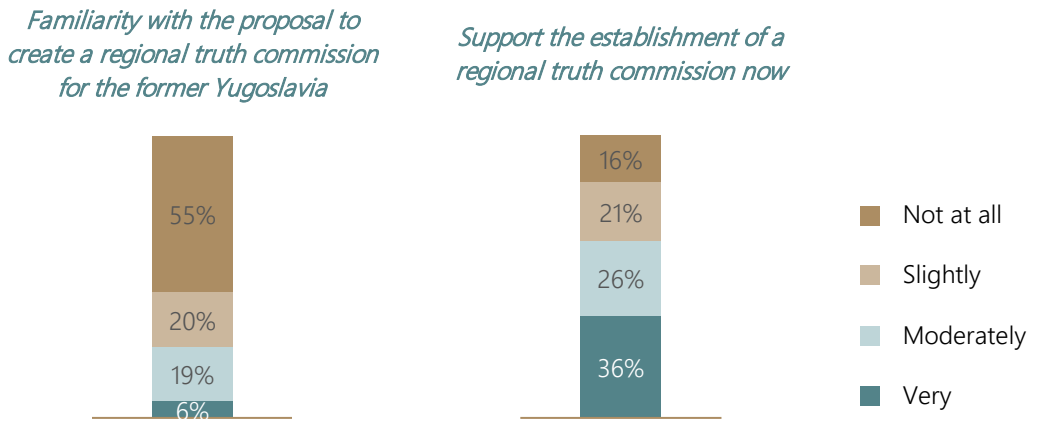
In Brčko, participants also recognized the importance of truth seeking, though the search for missing persons was less central than in Prijedor. Instead, they emphasized the broader need to acknowledge what happened and to move beyond competing versions of events. As one participant said, *"...the biggest obstacles are the fear of the truth. However, sometimes maybe each of us, or each from his own people, has his own version of the events, of what happened, and then we just go around in circles. Life can only be based on truth, and only on truth can a good future be built."* (Brčko participant)[40]

TRUTH COMMISSION EFFORTS

Truth commissions are a common mechanism used to establish consensus or promote understanding about historical events and facts, particularly in post-conflict societies. Among respondents, however, familiarity with the past proposal for a regional truth commission remains limited. More than half (55%) are not aware of it at all. Yet, once explained, support for a truth commission is relatively high, with 62% expressing moderate to very high support and only 16% not at all supportive.

Municipality findings show both low familiarity and varied support. Rogatica (74%) and Goražde (62%) report little to no awareness of the proposal. Support for creating such a commission also differs by location. A strong majority in Bratunac (69%) and a large share in Velika Kladuša (46%) would support creating a commission now, while only 4% favor this in Čapljina.

Figure 64: Perception of truth commission efforts - National survey (% of respondents)



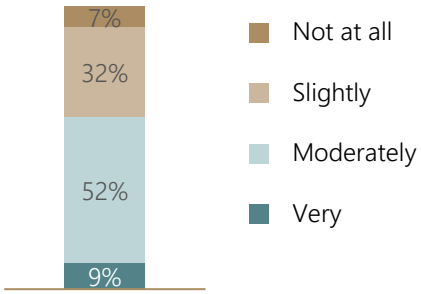
3.7 MEMORIALIZATION IS SUPPORTED BUT RISKS DIVIDING WITHOUT INCLUSION

CURRENT MEMORIALIZATION EFFORTS

Memorialization, through monuments, commemorations, and acts of public remembrance, is an important part of how societies acknowledge the past and recognize victims. While efforts to uncover and agree on the truth remain contentious, the question of how that truth is remembered is equally important and sensitive. Nationally, most respondents view current memorialization efforts as at least moderately sufficient. Nine percent rate these efforts as very sufficient, while 52% say they are moderately sufficient and 32% see them as only slightly sufficient. Just 7% feel memorialization to date is not sufficient at all.

The municipality surveys show varied assessments of memorialization. In Bratunac (41%) and Goražde (39%), a notably larger share finds such efforts very sufficient. By contrast, in Čapljina (1%) and Stolac (6%), very few rate efforts as very sufficient, with the majority there finding them only slightly sufficient. Perceptions are also divided in Rogatica, where 16% say memorialization is not sufficient at all, compared with just 2% in Busovača. Even where most respondents find efforts at least moderately sufficient, such as Busovača and Prijedor, there is still a substantial minority who see significant gaps.

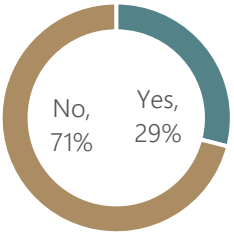
Figure 65: Sufficiency of memorialization efforts to date- National survey (% of respondents)



Nearly a third of respondents, 29%, say there are important events that are not yet memorialized. Those who feel certain events are missing attribute this mostly to a lack of public awareness (12%), political sensitivity (11%), insufficient funding (8%), and limited community support (6%). Other reasons include competing historical narratives, the controversial nature of some events, and governmental priorities.

The sense of missing commemoration also differs between municipalities. It is particularly pronounced in Velika Kladuša, where 48% say important events are not yet memorialized, and much lower in Bratunac (7%) and Rogatica (6%). In Velika Kladuša, the absence of memorialization is most often attributed to lack of public awareness (26%) and political sensitivities (26%), with insufficient funding (18%) and limited community support (17%) also prominent. In other places, these concerns are present but typically cited by much smaller shares.

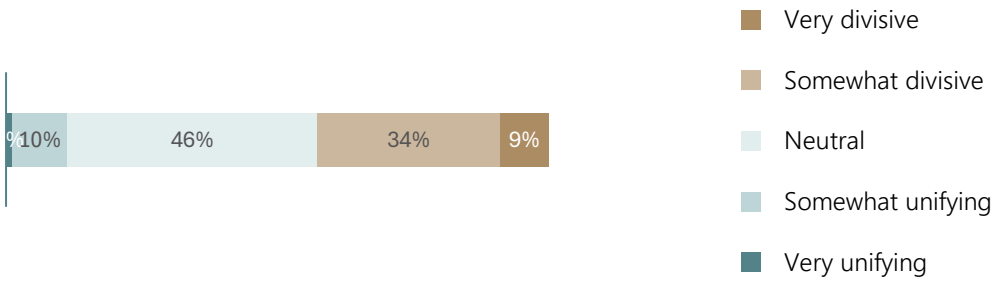
Figure 66: Existence of events that respondents want to see memorialized but are not.



EFFECTS ON INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Regarding the impact of memorialization on inter-ethnic relations, most respondents see a neutral effect, with 46% saying it is neither divisive nor unifying. However, a large share also sees memorialization as divisive, including 34% who describe it as somewhat divisive and 9% as very divisive. Only a small proportion say memorialization has been somewhat unifying (10%) or very unifying (1%). These findings suggest that memorialization is widely recognized, but not yet clearly experienced as a source of improved relations. Bosniak respondents are more likely to see memorialization as divisive compared to other groups. A combined 51% describes memorialization efforts as somewhat or very divisive, compared to 38% of Croat respondents and 32% of Serb respondents.

Figure 67: Impact of memorialization efforts on inter-ethnic relations – National survey (% of respondents)



Most municipalities mirror the national pattern, with neutrality often prevailing. Neutral views reach 54% in Rogatica and Stolac. At the same time, substantial portions still find memorialization divisive. Very divisive ratings reach 15% in Velika Kladuša and 12% in Busovača, while somewhat divisive views are frequent in Bratunac (47%), Prijedor (36%), and Čapljina (36%). Unifying effects of memorialization are rarely seen as strong or prevalent in any locality.

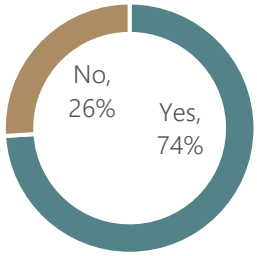
Focus group discussions help explain why memorialization can become sensitive even where everyday relations are more practical and cooperative. In municipalities where focus groups were conducted, commemorative practices were seen as recurrent flashpoints. In both Prijedor and Stolac, anniversaries of wartime atrocities were identified as moments when political actors inflame tensions, using public memory to reinforce ethnic narratives rather than encourage mutual recognition.

"I think as far as local people are concerned, there aren't any, the biggest problem is when those important dates come, that's why I think that for Serbs and Bosniaks, these celebrations and that, that's when some tensions might arise between these peoples, because it's simply normal that some want to celebrate one thing, others don't like it and that's when tensions arise, let's say January 9th, March 1st and what I don't know, not to mention other dates, there are just a lot of them, when those tensions are the greatest." (Prijedor participant)[41]

THE RIGHT TO MEMORIALIZE CIVILIAN VICTIMS

Despite concerns about the divisive potential of memorialization, there is strong support for the right of all ethnic groups to memorialize civilian victims. A clear majority, 76%, agree that all ethnic groups in their municipality should be able to put up memorials for their civilian victims, while 24% do not support this right. Among those opposed, the most common concerns are fear of vandalism or disrespect (10%), fear of reigniting ethnic tensions (9%), political opposition from local authorities (8%), and lack of agreement on historical narratives (6%). Other concerns include limited space, legal and bureaucratic obstacles, and resource constraints.

Figure 68: Should all ethnic groups in this municipality be able to put up memorials for their civilian victims National survey (% of respondents)

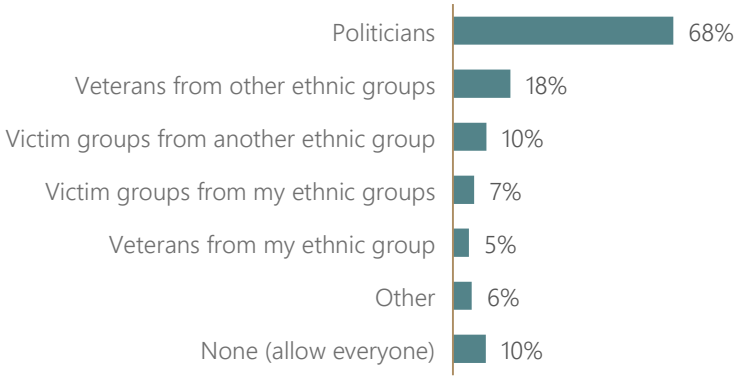


Views differ sharply across municipalities. Bratunac (86%), Busovača (79%), and Velika Kladuša (71%) show strong support for inclusive memorialization. By contrast, Čapljina (15%), Goražde (32%), Stolac (24%), and Rogatica (29%) show much less support, revealing deep resistance in some areas. Among those opposed, reasons vary. Fear of reigniting tensions is especially marked in Goražde (29%) and Rogatica (26%), while lack of agreement on the historical narrative stands out in Čapljina (32%) and Stolac (31%). Political opposition and fear of disrespect or vandalism are especially prominent in Čapljina, where 44% and 41% respectively point to these as key concerns.

When asked which groups should not be allowed to put up memorials, the strongest opposition is directed at politicians, cited by 68% of respondents. Far fewer mention veterans from other ethnic groups (18%). Only 10% would prohibit victim groups from another ethnic group, and 7% would restrict victim groups from their own community. At the same time, 10% say everyone should be allowed to memorialize.

At the municipality level, politicians are the most widely opposed actors, reaching 89% in Bratunac and 74% in Busovača. However, in Rogatica (31%) and Goražde (34%), sizeable minorities oppose victim groups from another ethnic background. In Čapljina, 36% object even to victim groups from within their own community.

Figure 69: Groups that should not be allowed to put memorials - National survey (% of respondents)



Decisions about memorial content and location should, according to most respondents, involve community consultation (41%) and collaboration with victims' families (39%). Public voting is supported by 31%, while expert committee review and guidance based on historical research receive support from 20% and 21% respectively. Sixteen percent view cultural significance assessment as important, and 17% advocate local or municipal government involvement. Nine percent think no specific process is needed, while 12% prefer a multi-stakeholder forum. Overall, respondents emphasize the importance of including multiple voices and ensuring that decisions are broadly representative.

Figure 70: Proposed process to decide on the content and location of memorials - National survey (% of respondents)



There is similar diversity in preferred processes across municipalities. Collaboration with victims' families receives the strongest support in Velika Kladuša (46%), Bratunac (44%), and Čapljina (43%), while public voting is preferred in Čapljina (43%), Stolac (44%), and Busovača (36%). Community consultation stands out in Velika Kladuša (36%) and Busovača (29%). Expert review and historical research are most important in Stolac (28% and 43%), Čapljina (19% and 40%), and Velika Kladuša (26% each). The share preferring no specific process is especially high in Bratunac (31%).

CONCLUSIONS

CONTEXT

This report presents the results of a nationwide survey of 1,000 randomly selected adults on public attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding basic needs, justice, and inter-ethnic relations. The analysis is complemented by additional data from a targeted oversample survey of 1,120 randomly selected adults across eight preselected municipalities, as well as findings from six focus groups. The research was conducted nearly thirty years after the end of the war, at a time when questions of accountability, memory, trust, and coexistence remain deeply relevant to public life. While much has changed since the 1990s, the findings show that the legacy of the war continues to shape how people think about justice, institutions, victims, and relations between communities.

Data collection also took place during a period of heightened political tension. In early 2025, the conviction of Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina triggered an institutional and political standoff between Republika Srpska authorities and state level institutions. The crisis intensified public debate about the authority of state institutions, rule of law, and the stability of the country. The findings should therefore be read against this broader background of long term post war challenges and immediate political uncertainty.

FINDINGS

The findings present a complex picture of public attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina nearly thirty years after the war. Everyday needs dominate people's personal priorities, especially health, finances, employment, housing, and family responsibilities. Yet justice and inter-ethnic relations remain important when framed as public and collective issues. The survey does not show a population focused only on the past, but it also does not show a society that has fully moved beyond it. Instead, many respondents see unresolved justice, limited trust, political dysfunction, and contested memory as continuing obstacles to stability and coexistence.

A recurring pattern is the difference between everyday local coexistence and deeper forms of engagement. Many people describe relations in their municipality more positively than relations in the country overall, and most believe different ethnic groups can participate freely in many aspects of daily life. At the same time, progress is seen as limited, participation in shared activities is uneven, and conversations about war, politics, identity, and memory remain difficult. Political leaders, corruption, ethno-nationalist politics, and media narratives are repeatedly identified as part of the problem.

Justice findings point to a similar tension. Most respondents do not believe justice has been fully achieved, and domestic war crimes trials are viewed with skepticism. Yet respondents continue to support justice efforts, including prosecutions, truth-telling, victim recognition, compensation, and memorialization.

The report is organized around 15 key analytical findings presenting detailed survey results. These are summarized below:

1. Daily needs come first, but justice and cohesion matter
   People are primarily focused on immediate personal needs. Health, financial stability, family care, housing, and jobs dominate personal priorities, while justice for wartime events and improving relations with other ethnic groups are mentioned much less often. However, direct questions on the topic show that justice and cohesion remain important collective priorities.

2. Politics and corruption are seen as central challenges
   Respondents most often understand the country's problems as political, systemic, and economic. Political leaders are identified as a root cause by 48% of respondents, while corruption is cited by 45%. Local data and focus group discussions reinforce this finding, showing how corruption, political loyalty, and weak

accountability are linked to access to jobs, services, and influence. Politics is not seen only as a governance issue, but as a central obstacle to trust and progress.

3. Slow progress but high demand for improved inter-ethnic relations
   Inter-ethnic relations are viewed more positively at the local level than nationally. While national relations are often described as neutral or negative, most respondents describe relations in their municipality as positive or very positive. Yet progress is seen as limited: about half say local relations have stayed the same over the past decade. This helps explain why support for continued efforts remains high, even where everyday coexistence appears relatively functional.

4. Coexistence exists, but deeper engagement remains limited
   The survey shows evidence of everyday coexistence, but less evidence of sustained engagement. Many respondents report having friends, colleagues, or classmates from other ethnic groups, and 61% say there are places where people from different backgrounds can meet. However, regular participation in inter-ethnic activities is limited, membership in diverse associations is low, and willingness to discuss sensitive topics is constrained. Contact exists, but deeper dialogue and organized engagement remain uneven.

5. Divisive politics, war legacies and education limit progress
   Respondents identify a broad set of barriers to improving inter-ethnic relations. Ethno-nationalist politics, the legacy of the war, lack of trust, media misinformation, economic inequality, discrimination, and stereotypes all appear as obstacles. Schools are viewed ambivalently: they are not widely seen as worsening relations, but they are also not consistently seen as helping young people process the past or build mutual understanding. Focus groups suggest that politics, media, and education can reinforce rather than reduce division.

6. Support for high standards for public office
   There is strong concern about individuals accused of wartime crimes serving in public roles. Most respondents believe this would damage both inter-ethnic relations and trust in institutions. A majority also oppose allowing people accused but not convicted of war crimes to serve in public positions. The finding is important because it links accountability, public office, and institutional trust: who holds authority matters for how people perceive the state and relations between communities.

7. Limited trust and low engagement hinder inter-ethnic efforts
   Although most respondents say improved inter-ethnic relations are important, no actor is widely trusted to lead this work. Schools, NGOs, cultural and ethnic organizations, and international organizations receive some recognition, but no institution or group stands out. Nearly one quarter say they trust no actor to improve relations. Existing initiatives also have limited reach: only 3% report direct engagement. The gap between support for improved relations and actual engagement is one of the report's central findings.

8. Public support for practical cooperation and reforms
   Respondents identify practical and reform-oriented ways to improve relations. The most common proposal is more contact between members of different ethnic groups, but many also support joint community projects, cultural exchanges, reducing ethnic bias in education, ending ethno-nationalist politics, prosecuting politicians who fuel tensions, and eradicating discrimination.

9. Justice remains incomplete as continued action is supported
   Very few respondents believe that justice for war crimes has been fully achieved or that the legacy of the war has been fully addressed. Justice is understood broadly, including trials, truth-telling, acknowledgment,

compensation for victims, community reconciliation, and an end to the celebration of war criminals. Continued justice efforts remain important to many respondents, though local differences are substantial. The key message is that justice remains unfinished, but still relevant.

10. **Public awareness of domestic war trials remains limited**
    Domestic war crimes trials remain distant from much of the public. Awareness of both past and ongoing prosecutions is limited, and direct involvement with investigations, testimony, or trial attendance is rare. Most information comes through television and social media rather than direct engagement or active information seeking.

11. **Trust in domestic war crimes trials is limited by concerns about fairness, bias and corruption**
    Trust in domestic war crimes prosecutions is weak. Many respondents believe trials do not sufficiently focus on crimes committed in their own municipality, and perceptions of fairness are mixed or negative. Concerns about political influence, corruption, lack of transparency, and bias are widespread. These findings do not necessarily mean that respondents reject prosecutions, but they show that domestic justice processes face a serious legitimacy challenge.

12. **Trials effectiveness is questioned but demand for more prosecutions remains**
    Respondents are skeptical about whether domestic trials have effectively delivered justice or improved inter-ethnic relations. Many point to political influence, slow legal processes, corruption, inadequate sentences, and weak victim support. Yet this skepticism does not translate into rejection of prosecutions. Most respondents still consider continued domestic prosecutions important, and many reject ending them altogether. Trials are seen as flawed and insufficient, but still necessary.

13. **Victim recognition and support remain insufficient and uneven**
    A large majority of respondents report some exposure to wartime violence, yet many believe victims' needs remain inadequately addressed. Legal rights and recognition, psychological support, financial compensation, and medical care are seen as important. Government support is often viewed as insufficient, and many believe ethnic identity affects how well victims are served. Focus groups reinforce the idea that recognition, memory, reparations, and dignity remain central to how people understand justice.

14. **Truth remains contested but dialogue and truth seeking are supported**
    Many respondents feel they understand the events of the 1990s, but few believe there is strong agreement across ethnic groups about what happened. Barriers to acknowledgment include politics, fear, nationalism, stigma, and entrenched historical narratives. At the same time, many respondents support dialogue, independent documentation, joint memorial activities, balanced media coverage, and continued efforts to locate missing persons. Truth remains contested, but truth-seeking is not rejected.

15. **Memorialization is supported but risks deepening divisions without inclusions**
    Memorialization is widely recognized as part of dealing with the past, but it is not clearly experienced as unifying. Many respondents see memorialization as neutral or divisive, especially where commemorations are shaped by politics or competing narratives. At the same time, most support the right of all ethnic groups to memorialize civilian victims. The findings suggest that memorialization can support recognition, but only if it is inclusive, victim centered and protected from political instrumentalization.

Compared with surveys conducted by the authors in situations closer to active conflict, displacement, or acute insecurity, the findings from Bosnia and Herzegovina logically show less emphasis on immediate physical safety and more emphasis on governance, institutional legitimacy, political manipulation, contested memory, and the perceived limits of already established justice mechanisms. The issue here is not whether dialogue or trials can produce greater social cohesion and justice, but rather whether stronger trust or shared understanding can be achieved in their absence. In that sense, Bosnia and Herzegovina resembles other post conflict settings in showing that such efforts must be broader. However, it also stands out because unresolved justice and cohesion challenges persist within a long standing, highly institutionalized, and politically contested post war order, where public trust is repeatedly weakened by unsatisfied basic needs, political dysfunction, selective memory, and doubts about whether institutions serve all communities fairly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to ten recommendations that should be pursued together. Basic needs, social cohesion, justice, institutional trust, victim recognition, truth seeking, and memorialization are closely connected in the report. Addressing one without the others risks leaving the underlying problems unchanged. These recommendations therefore aim to balance immediate social and economic concerns with longer term efforts to strengthen trust, accountability, justice, and relations between communities.

1. Treat basic needs as an entry point for social cohesion and justice
   Development, service delivery, and social welfare policies should be designed with social cohesion and justice objectives in mind. Healthcare, employment, housing, infrastructure, youth opportunities, and support for families are the issues that most directly shape daily life, but they also affect whether people trust institutions and feel treated fairly. Programs addressing basic needs should therefore be implemented transparently and inclusively, especially in mixed communities and return areas. Economic development, employment initiatives, health services, and social assistance should be designed to reduce perceptions of unequal access, political favoritism, and ethnic or party based exclusion.

2. Rebuild trust in institutions through accountable governance
   The findings show that politics and corruption are seen as central challenges, and that political actors are often viewed as undermining inter-ethnic relations. This makes governance reform central to both social cohesion and justice. Greater transparency, merit based recruitment, public accountability, and stronger oversight of local and national institutions should be prioritized. This should include clear and legally sound standards for public office and public administration, especially for positions that affect trust between communities. Vetting and eligibility procedures related to individuals accused of wartime crimes should be transparent, consistent, and grounded in due process, while recognizing that many respondents see the presence of such individuals in public roles as damaging to inter-ethnic relations and institutional trust.

3. Invest in practical local cooperation, not only dialogue
   Respondents support practical forms of cooperation, including more contact between groups, joint community projects, cultural exchange, youth engagement, and cooperation in economic development, health, education, sport, and community services. These efforts should be expanded and tailored to local conditions rather than implemented as one model across the country. Practical cooperation is particularly important because many people already experience everyday coexistence, but deeper engagement remains limited. Programs should therefore create repeated, useful, and visible opportunities for people to work together on shared concerns, including local infrastructure, youth activities, environmental issues, business initiatives, and community services.

4. **Increase the reach, visibility, and credibility of cohesion initiatives**
   Existing initiatives to improve inter-ethnic relations have limited reach, and only a small share of respondents reports direct engagement. Peacebuilding and cohesion programs should therefore invest more in outreach, local visibility, and accessibility, especially beyond the groups already involved in civil society activities. Support should include small local grants, partnerships with schools, youth groups, cultural organizations, veterans, victims' groups, and municipalities, and clear communication about what these initiatives do. Programs should also be monitored and evaluated in ways that show whether they increase participation, trust, cooperation, or willingness to engage, rather than only counting activities.

5. **Strengthen education as a long term foundation for social cohesion**
   Education appears both as a possible bridge and as a source of concern. Schools are not widely seen as worsening relations, but many respondents are unconvinced that they are doing enough to help young people understand the past or improve inter-ethnic relations. Education reforms should therefore focus on balanced historical learning, critical thinking, civic education, and reducing ethnic bias. This should include teacher training, shared extracurricular activities, youth exchanges, joint school projects, and opportunities for students to meet across community lines. In places where schooling remains structurally divided, reforms should focus on reducing separation, increasing joint learning opportunities, and ensuring that young people encounter multiple perspectives in a safe and age appropriate way.

6. **Create safe spaces for difficult conversations**
   The report shows that willingness to discuss sensitive topics, especially the war and the 1990s, remains limited. Dialogue should therefore be supported, but it must be carefully structured and locally grounded. The aim should not be to force agreement, but to create conditions for respectful exchange, acknowledgment of harm, and better understanding of why different narratives persist. Dialogue initiatives should involve trained facilitators and include victims, veterans, youth, educators, journalists, religious actors, and civic leaders where appropriate. They should also address the role of media and public discourse, since misinformation, political narratives, and selective memory are repeatedly identified as barriers to improved relations.

7. **Strengthen the credibility and transparency of domestic justice processes**
   Justice remains important, but domestic war crimes trials face skepticism related to fairness, political influence, corruption, transparency, and effectiveness. Continued prosecutions should be supported, but they must be accompanied by reforms that increase public confidence. This includes stronger case management, better communication with the public, protection from political interference, adequate resources, and improved support for victims and witnesses. Justice institutions should also expand public outreach. Many respondents have limited awareness of domestic prosecutions and little direct contact with the process. Clear, accessible information about ongoing cases, completed trials, legal standards, and local relevance could help reduce distance between justice institutions and the communities they are meant to serve.

8. **Combine prosecutions with truth seeking and acknowledgment**
   Trials alone cannot address all expectations associated with justice. Respondents also define justice through truth telling, acknowledgment, compensation, reconciliation, and ending the celebration of war criminals. Justice policy should therefore combine prosecutions with complementary measures, including documentation, acknowledgment, apologies where appropriate, public education, reparations, and efforts to locate missing persons. Support for a regional truth commission and other truth seeking mechanisms should be acknowledged and accompanied by broad public engagement.

9. **Improve victim recognition and support across all communities**
   Victim recognition and support remain central to justice and reconciliation. Support systems should be expanded and standardized so that victims and families can access legal recognition, psychological support, medical care, financial compensation, and social services regardless of ethnic background, location, or political connection. Victims' groups should also be supported to become more representative, accessible, and constructive in public life. This includes encouraging cooperation across communities where possible, while recognizing that victims' experiences and needs differ by locality. Support should be based on needs, trauma informed and protected from political instrumentalization.

10. **Make memorialization inclusive, victim centered, and locally legitimate**
    Memorialization is supported, but it is often seen as neutral or divisive rather than unifying. This means that memorials and commemorations should be designed through inclusive processes involving victims' families, affected communities, local residents, historians or experts where appropriate, and municipal authorities. All ethnic groups should be able to memorialize civilian victims, but processes must address concerns about political manipulation, vandalism, competing narratives, and renewed tensions. Memorialization should be connected to education, documentation, and public acknowledgment, and should avoid becoming a tool for political mobilization. Done carefully, it can support recognition; done poorly, it can deepen division.

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not face a choice between addressing basic needs and addressing justice or social cohesion. The evidence points in the opposite direction: economic security, public services, institutional trust, credible justice, victim recognition, and everyday cooperation are mutually reinforcing. Sustainable progress will require practical local work, stronger institutions, and continued attention to the unresolved legacies of the war.

NOTES

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[15] Pa nema tu nešto mnogo, ne znam, da mi možemo uraditi, onako, lično, da se možemo boriti protiv toga, jer kod nas najviše novac prevladava, a novca najviše ima u politici, tako da…

[16] …moraš biti politički podoban moraš biti blizak općini i glavešinama u općini čekati godinama biti im sluga biti podoban ispunjavati njihove želje njihove potrebe a većina izvisi na kraju prazna obećanja…

[17] Ja u svom društvu ne gledam toliko na tu podijeljenost, ili tipa u školi, nije mi to toliko bitno kao što je bitno, ne znam, u takvim nekim gradovima gdje je baš to izraženo.

[18] Postoje određeni datumi gdje mi… Znamo svake godine da će da porastu tenzije. Pogotovo tamo oko nove godine i Božića i ne znam kad su i Bajrami također. Znači svaki put uvijek ima određeni period gdje rastu te tenzije, gdje se to promoviše i medijski.

[19] Pa, ja imam sad 20 godina, tako da ne znam baš ni kakva je bila situacija u stolacu. Prije 10 godina, ali znam da sada je zategnuto i da nije ni malo dobro. Većinom neće niko da kaže svoje mišljenje, a sada zna šta mu neko misli.

[20] Možda je čak više u ovoj situaciji sada trenutno, možda je čak i gora nego što je i bila. Ali ne znam, da su škole i političari i mediji krivi, svi su oni podjednako krivi što se mene tiče.

[21] …smatram da, znači, da upravo ta konstrukcija između Srba i Bošnjaka bi trebali da budu ti predstavnici vlasti. E sad, nažalost, što se to koristi u neke druge svrhe i mislim da su oni upravo ti koji produbljuju razlike među ljudima jednima i drugima

[22] Ja sam takog stava da su mediji po meni. I najveći, da kažem, tako neki, može to grubo reći, zagovornici neke netrpeljivosti, jer uvijek je bilo ko vas plaća i govori ono što on zahtijeva, što traži, što mu se sviđa.

[23] …politike da se to ne dogodi znači čista segregacija u društvu negativno

[24] Od kuće kreće odgoj, da svoje djece prenosimo, da učimo svoju djecu da živimo u multikulturalnoj sredini, da cijenimo svoje, poštujemo tuđe i to je, dakle, polazna tačka sa koje možemo raditi odnose.

[25] Pa najveći stepen saradnje između mošnjaka i hrvata u Stolcu nekako vidi možda dom zdravlja, Stolac, ne znam, tako, trgovina, ekonomija, ugostiteljstvo. Istina je da ljudi različitih vjera i dalje uspješno postoje i sarađuju, ali da tenzija postoje u nekom političkom smislu i društvenom, to je i pekako otigledno.

[26] …Napravljeno je zajedničko, jeli, obrazovanje u Brčkom nema. U njemu nije bilo, u stvari, ono, dvije škole pod jednim krovom nije poznanica. Integrisano je, dakle, obrazovanje.

[27] one često pokriječu projekte koji promovišu dialog, toleranciju i zajednički rad… …posebno među nama mladima

[28] …tako da Stolac nogomet odnosno sport po prirodi svojoj spaja ljude i mislim da je uzalut tim političarima da nastoje da se razjedine sport će prije ili kasnije ujediniti ljude na ovaj ili onaj način

[29] Znam da su, bili su procesi protiv tih ljudi koji su učestvovali u tim zločinima, ali sad, jesu li oni davali neke podatke ili nisu, ja ne znam. Ali ako to već dosad nije pronađeno, pitanje je hoće li se moći nešto…

[30] Ja ću se samo kratko nadovezati, znači, svi znamo da su presude bile i da su donesene. Međutim, opet politika i mediji rade svoje, znači, kod jednog naroda se minimizira, kod drugog se veliča i tako u krug. Tako da, iako suđenje postoji, mislim da pravda nije zaživjela među ljudima.

[31] …ali mislim da je to sve do politike… puno je ljudi nestalo i puno je nastradalo, svakakve nacije, ali evo već 30 godina se tu ništa ne radi po tom pitanju…

[32] …pokušavam evo već više od deceniju da se izgradi spomenik obijenog djece grada Prijedora. Do danas to nismo uspjeli, znači došli smo do onoga nivoa kad gradonačelnik treba da kaže ide ili ne ide, međutim isti čovjek ne želi da razgovara apsolutno… Kada gospodin ne želi da primi predstavnike međunarodnih institucija koje podržavaju inicijativu izgradnje spomenika ja nisam ni bitan, znači ja nisam ličnost s koje bi se on trebao ostiditi ili bojati.

[33] Dok se god ovi političari na to kupuju bodove, na te žrtve i na te učesnike rata. Znači, ja ne vidim da će to ikad biti, barem u ovim generacijama.

[34] …obilježava nešto neki datum ili skup ili nešto onda politika pošto su ta udruženja finansirane od politike onda oni moraju za to što dobiju nešto srstava moraju dati neku izjavu i onda oni izliječu sa tom izjavu bilo da je H ili B komponenta…

[35] svak ima svoju istinu pa čak i u pojedino etničkoj grupini hrvati recimo pitate deset ljudi deset je istina tu tako i bošnjaka a ne da se onaj slože u jednoj istini

[36] Ne znam, znalo je bit situacija gdje tri različita medija prenose tri različite informacije i sad imamo

[37] …mislim da bi da bi vrlo brzo se sve saznalo jer i oni što koji zna koji znaju šta i kako neće on pričati a da nema nekog tog interesa pogotovo stariji od mene ljudi koji su već u godinama i presmrt sigurno on neće jer tu vlada jedan veliki strah strah od od osvete njemu ili njegovi naskrednicima

[38] I kogod je počinio, i ako je počinio, taj neko neće priznati javno. Stvarno ne znam što bi nešto osporio.

[39] Prošlo je skoro 30 godina, a još uvijek se traže posmrtni ostaci. Ljudi umiru, a nisu našli svoju djecu. To je najveća rana i najveća nepravda.

[40] …najveće prepreke su strah od istine. Dakle, međutim, ponekad možda svako od nas ili svako iz svog naroda ima svoju verziju događaja, događanja itd. I onda se tu vrtimo, okrećemo u krug. Dakle, samo se na istini može bazirati život i samo na istini se može bazirati lijepa budućnost..

[41] Mislim što se tiče lokalnih, tu i nema nekih, ono, najveći problem je kad dođu ti bitni datori, zato mi je za Srbe i Bošnjake ta obilježavanja i to, tu, tad se možda podignu neke tenzije između tih naroda, jer jednostavno, normalno je da jedni žele obilježiti jedno, drugima se to ne sviđa i tad dođe do ti tenzija, recimo da 9. januar, 1. mart i šta ja znam ostale datume da ne spominjem, baš ima toga dosta, kad su te tenzije najveće.