

Research analysis

ENHANCING INTER-ETHNIC COOPERATION IN NORTH MITROVICA



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

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BACKGROUND

North Mitrovica is one of a few multi-ethnic urban areas in Kosovo. The city has several settlements that are truly multi-ethnic, predominantly inhabited by Albanians and Serbs, but with a significant number of Bosnians and Roma. These settlements have had different destinies over time. The Bosniak Mahala and Tri Solitera/Tre Soliterat (with areas of Brdjani) settlements were hot spots for inter-ethnic tensions in the past, while the Mikronaselje/Kodraminatorve settlement represented a relatively peaceful environment. Over time, tensions subsided and these settlements retained their multi-ethnic character. Currently, these settlements no longer represent a problem, but rather an advantage of the municipality of North Mitrovica. Unfortunately, this advantage is not used enough and the settlements have somehow been thrown out of focus and attention. This paper aims to investigate the views of citizens of all nationalities about living conditions in these settlements and the possibilities to improve the situation and cooperation of citizens.

Considering that the level of interaction and cooperation among different communities in the municipality is not at a high level, the paper seeks to contribute to increasing the level of inter-ethnic collaboration and support inter-ethnic cooperation and initiatives which will bring together communities in multi-ethnic zones in North Mitrovica.

Legal framework of Local-level participation mechanisms

Local-level participation mechanisms offer significant assistance to communities in a numerical minority in any given municipality in realizing their human rights to education, freedom from discrimination, freedom of religion, employment, access to services, and social welfare, among others.

The legal framework in Kosovo provides a range of obligations on Kosovo institutions to safeguard and promote communities' equal participation in local governance. Key international instruments providing the right to equal participation in public affairs are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), both of which are directly applicable in Kosovo. The ICCPR expressly states that every citizen has the right to participate in public affairs without discrimination. The FCNM also requires governments to create the conditions necessary for effective community participation in cultural, social, and economic life and public affairs.

In Kosovo, the key bodies acting at the local level to support all communities' equal enjoyment of their right to participation in public affairs are:

- ✚ Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC)
- ✚ Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (DCMAC).
- ✚ Communities Committees (CCs),
- ✚ Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns (MOCRs),

While these four mechanisms have the potential to function as a coherent system at the local level, their ability to do so is negatively affected by significant gaps in the legal framework and numerous problems in practical implementation.

Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC):

In the process of DMC appointment in municipalities where at least 10 percent of the citizens belong to non-majority communities, the Mayor must propose candidates for the DMC post, who must be approved by the majority of the Municipal Assembly (MA) members present and voting, including a majority of MA members from non-majority communities present and voting, with vacant posts being filled within 30 days. The term of office for the position runs in parallel with that of the mayor. The Administrative Instruction also requires candidates to be resident in the municipality for a minimum of three years, and to be "members of a minority group which make up the largest minority community in the municipality"

Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC), shall assist the Mayor and provide him/her advice and guidance to the Mayor on issues related to the non-majority communities. DMC shall support and affirm the requests of minority communities before the municipal organs.

Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (DCMAC):

In municipalities where 10 percent or more of residents are from communities in a numerical minority at the municipal level, the post of the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities shall be held by the non-majority community's candidate who received the most votes on the open list of candidates for election to the Municipal Assembly, including the criterion that the post-holder must be a member of a community in a numerical minority in the municipality.

Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (DCMAC) shall promote inter-community dialogue and serve as a formal focal point for addressing non-majority communities' concerns and interests in meetings of the Assembly and its work.

Communities Committee (CC):

The Communities Committees (CCs) are municipal mechanisms comprised of representatives of communities living in the municipality and municipal assembly members. All communities residing in a given municipality must have at least one representative in the CCs. They are mandated to ensure that the rights and interests of communities are respected through the review and provision of recommendations on municipal policies and actions, and should meet at least once per month.

Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR)

Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR) aim is to contribute to the implementation of international community rights agreements and instruments directly applicable in Kosovo, the Law on Local Self-Government, and the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their members. The Regulation also states that MOCRs should protect and promote community rights, ensure equal access to services, and create the conditions for sustainable returns.

The situation of Local-level participation mechanisms in the municipality of North Mitrovica

Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC)

The municipality of North Mitrovica has a deputy mayor who comes from the community (Ms. Adrijana Hodzic). She is very concerned about the rights and positions of communities and other vulnerable groups. However, the election process was not under the procedure for the election of Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC), this person is elected as a regular deputy. In this regard, we cannot say that the municipality officially has a Deputy Mayor for Communities (DMC) in a legal way.

We must mention that during the research, it was noted that the deputy is doing a good job and that she is sincerely trying to improve the situation of the communities, but the legal procedure was not followed.

Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (DCMAC).

The municipality of North Mitrovica has a Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (DCMAC) who comes from the communities. At the first meeting of the assembly, Mr. Skender Sadiku from the Albanian community was elected according to the procedures provided by law. He performs his duties according to procedures and is very active in the field.

Communities Committee (CC)

The municipality of North Mitrovica has a Communities Committee (CC) established, and representatives of all communities are taking part in the work of the committee. The Communities Committee (CC) is composed of representatives of the Serbian, Albanian, Gorani, Bosniak, and RAE communities. The chairman has been elected and is a representative of the Gorani community.

The committee meets regularly and functions in a formal legal sense. However, the capacity of the committee is very low. There is a serious willingness of committee members to engage in work and be active, but they need constant support and training to be able to perform their function.

Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR)

The municipality of North Mitrovica doesn't have Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR)

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the Municipality of North Mitrovica in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. The research was conducted through a door-to-door survey, focus groups with targeted groups, and a set of interviews with specific community members.

- Survey: 210 responders (March 2022)
- Focus groups: 4 focus groups (May-April 2022)
- Interviews: 10 interviews (June 2022)

A field survey was conducted to measure the perception of communities in North Mitrovica on inter-ethnic relations and cooperation. The quantitative research was done through face-to-face field research conducted between the 1st of March and the 24th of March 2022. A total of 210 citizens (70 in each settlement) were queried throughout the targeted multi-ethnic areas in the municipality of North Mitrovica, Mikronaselje/Kodraminatorve, Tri Solitera/Tre Soliterat (with areas of Brdjani), and Bosniak Mahala, with responders of different ethnic background, K/Serb, K/Albanian, K/Bosnian communities. The survey was conducted taking into account the equal representation of all communities, as well as an equal representation of men and women, and the participation of citizens of all ages.

Demographic data of survey:

Gender:

- 53% female
- 47% male

Age:

- 59% under 25 years
- 34% between 26-59 years
- 7% older than 60 years

Ethnicity:

- 38% K-Albanian
- 31% K-Serb
- 22% K-Bosnian
- 5% Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
- 4% Others (Gorani, Montenegrin, Turkish)

Working status:

- 21% students
- 14% unemployed
- 39% employed in the public,
- 16% employed in the private sector
- 5% employed in an NGO
- 4% owner of own business
- 1% Pensioner

Demographic data of the Focus group:

4 focus groups were held with 40 participants (22 male and 18 female).

Ethnicity:

- 12 Albanians,
- 14 Serbs,
- 10 Bosnians,
- 3 Roma,
- 2 Gorani
- 2 persons from mixed marriages

Interviews:

Interviews were held with representatives of institutions that work with communities. Additionally, meetings were held with all members of the community committee, the vice president of the assembly who comes from the communities, as well as with prominent citizens in the settlements covered by the project.

KEY RESEARCH RESULTS

47% of respondents are not satisfied with the living environment in their neighbourhood

14% of respondents have everyday contact with people from other communities living in their neighbourhood, while 31 have occasional contact

82% of respondents think that there will be no conflict in their settlement in the near future

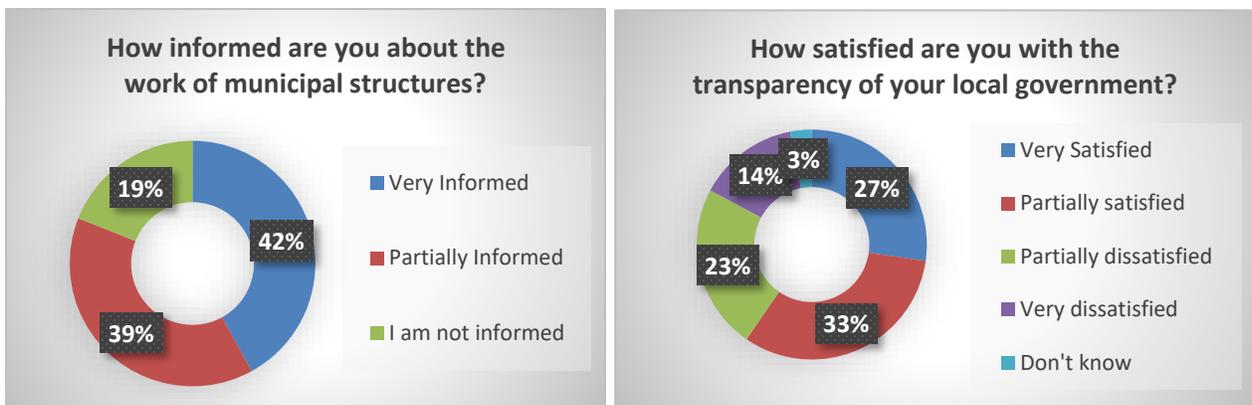
23% of respondents know more than ten (10) people that moved out of their neighbourhood in the past 5 years

12% of respondents thought about leaving/moving out of the settlement in the last twelve months

PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS

On the work and transparency of local self government

In the questionnaire, we asked questions related to how satisfied people are with the cooperation and information they receive from their municipality. Our goal was to determine how informed the residents of these multi-ethnic areas are. Similar questions were asked in the focus groups and the interviews.



The results of the survey show that the residents of these settlements are half-satisfied with the transparency of the municipality. There is no large difference here when we look at the results separately by settlement, nor is there any difference when we look at the age of the respondents.

- 52% of responders are satisfied or partially satisfied with the transparency of local government
- 37% of responders are dissatisfied or partially dissatisfied with the transparency of local government
- 42% of responders stated that are well informed and 39% stated that informed but partly.

The results obtained during focus groups and interviews were similar. The participants pointed out that they know what is happening in the municipality and what kind of projects are being implemented. However, they noted that, unfortunately, there is no permanent mechanism for communication with the residents of the settlement. For this purpose, they pointed out that it would be good to organize regular meetings of representatives of the municipality with multi-ethnic settlements because these settlements require specific and greater attention than before. Younger respondents mentioned the problem of not updating the website of the municipality,

while members of the Albanian community noted that the social networks run by the municipality usually do not have a translation into the Albanian language.

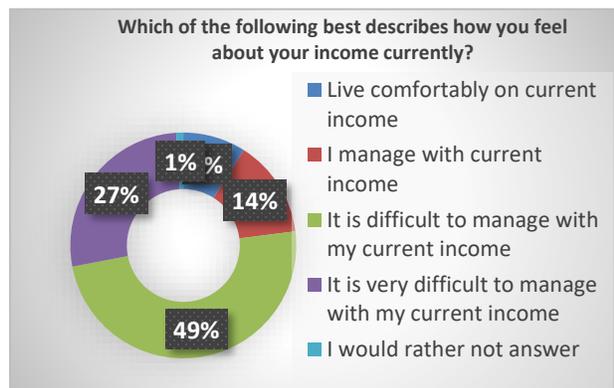
Perception of living conditions

We asked the respondents how satisfied they are with their current living conditions, how they perceive life in the settlement, and whether they see any progress. These questions aimed to determine their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the living conditions and to explore if they see a perspective in their settlement.



The results of the research showed that the perception of living conditions in the settlement is quite bad. What is particularly worrying is that the younger the respondents, the higher the dissatisfaction with living conditions.

Almost half of responders 47% stated that are not satisfied with living environment, while only 24% are satisfied.



When we look only the young responders (under 25 years old) that number is even higher. 62% stated that they are not satisfied, and only 11% answered that they are.

82% of responders live in their property or with their parents.

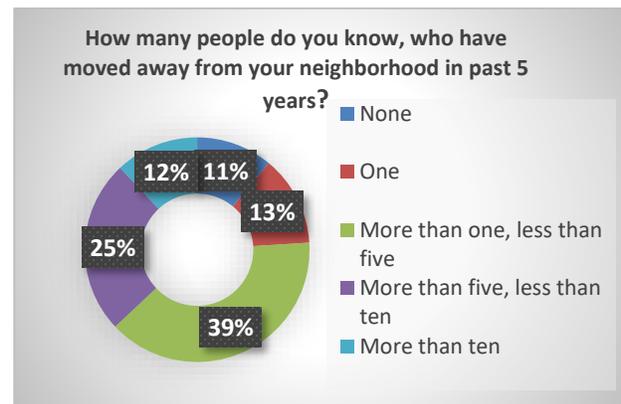
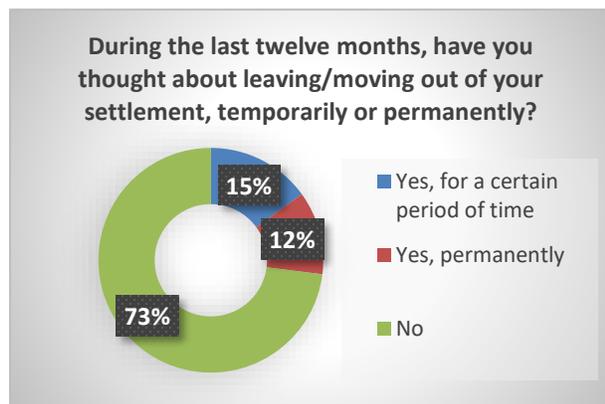
For 76% responders It is difficult (or very difficult) to manage with their current income.

Similar answers were received during focus groups and interviews. It was emphasized that there is a large number of extremely poor citizens who need social assistance as well as community assistance. Furthermore, it was pointed out that not enough is being done to improve living conditions in multi-ethnic settlements.

Unfortunately, we do not have data to compare with other parts of North Mitrovica municipality, hence we cannot know if the situation is different, but this shows that the life of the residents, and especially the life of young people, in these settlements is extremely difficult. This, of course, leads to various problems, especially emigration. The issue of migration will be further dealt with in the research.

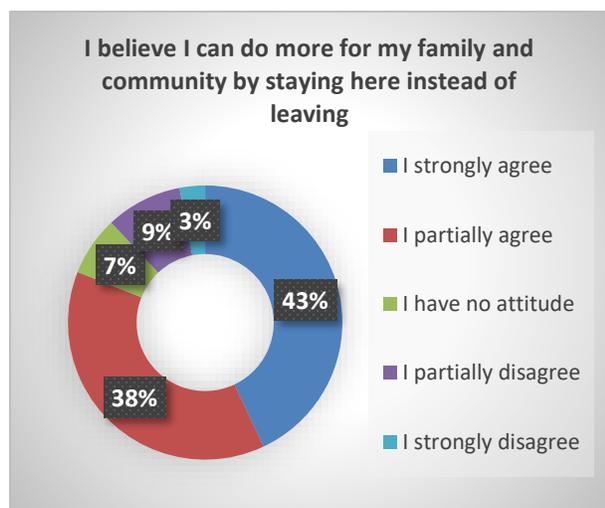
Migration

The next set of questions was related to migration movements. We wanted to examine how much the migration process is a problem in the settlement and what is the attitude of the residents on this issue. Migration was also part of the discussion in the focus groups.



The research showed that migration is one of the major problems. Poor living conditions and dissatisfaction of young people with the standard of living lead to migration and departure of youth.

According to the data obtained, 23% of respondents know more than ten (10) people that moved out of their neighbourhood in the past 5 years.



Furthermore, 12% of respondents thought about leaving/moving out of the settlement in the last twelve months.

A big problem is that the vast majority of responders that stated that they do not want to live in the settlement are younger than 25 years old (88%).

On the other hand, we also have some positive results:

81% of responders stated that they believe that they can do more for the community by staying

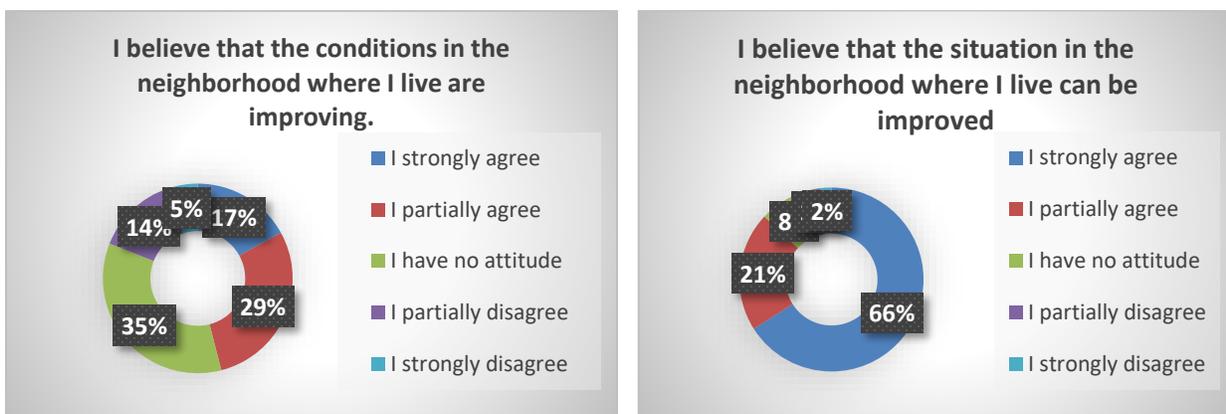
instead of leaving. We can see this as a positive effect that gives the possibility to work on the reduction of migration.

What is concerning is that a large number of respondents know a significant number of people who have already moved out. It indicates that the departure of young people is already a problem and is causing negative effects.

In the focus groups, this was acknowledged as the biggest concern. The outflow of young people, especially members of the Albanian and other non-Serb communities, is significant. The departure to larger centers is influenced by the lack of work or prospects, poor infrastructure conditions, and the political situation.

Perspective towards improvement of condition in settlements

Through the following questions, we wanted to explore the attitude of the respondents, whether the situation is improving or whether they hope that the situation will enhance.



Regarding the current improvement of living conditions in the settlements, we can say that most people have a positive view, although we have to be careful because over a third of the respondents do not have an opinion, which is a significant number. The fact that only 19% of respondents have a negative attitude gives us some hope.

On the other hand, when asked about the belief whether the situation can be improved, the vast majority of respondents answered positively:

- 66% of respondents believe and an additional 21% partially believe that the situation in the settlements can be improved.

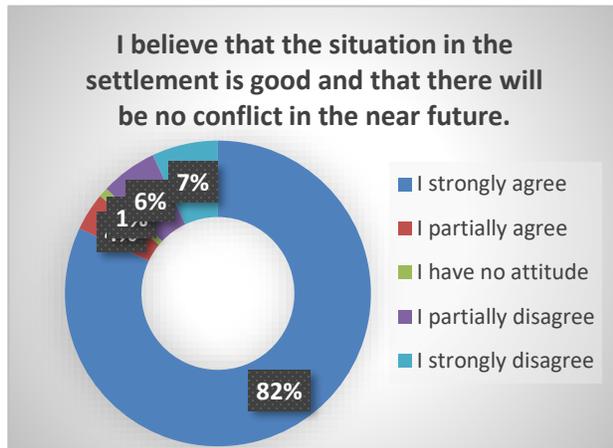
The situation is similar with the interviews and focus groups. The general assessment is that there is a positive attitude towards improving the situation and it can be concluded that optimism prevails. Most of the focus group participants believe that bad times in these settlements have passed and that there are now conditions for improvement, with a strong conviction that such progress will occur.

Interethnic cooperation

Most of the questions in the questionnaire are related to the main topic of this research, which is inter-ethnic cooperation between communities in settlements. Through a set of different questions, we tried to determine the level of trust between communities, and the way

communities feel in a multi-ethnic settlement. Furthermore, we wanted to examine what types of contacts they have, how often, the level of trust, and their expectations.

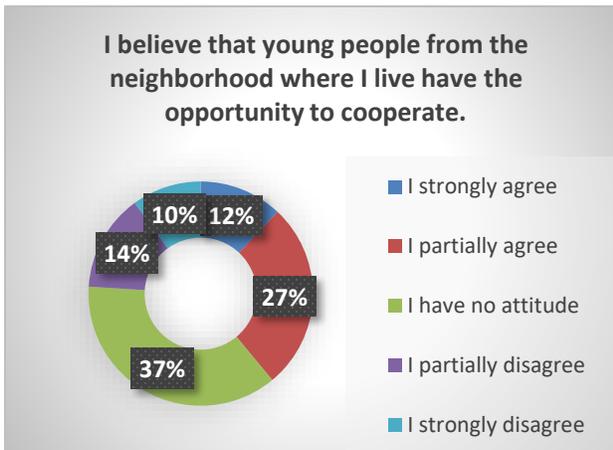
Through focus groups and interviews, the main topic of conversation and discussion was the inter-ethnic cooperation in the settlements and potential issues that need to be changed.



We asked the participants if they were afraid that inter-ethnic conflicts could occur in the settlement, and the vast majority of respondents (82%) believe that such a possibility does not exist.

Through focus groups and interviews, we received the same answers. The majority of participants pointed out that there is no intolerance between people, and that difficult times are far behind us. Interethnic relations between residents are not burdened with

conflict, nor can conflicts arise from them, even in moments when there were some incidents in the city, the situation in multi-ethnic settlements did not change.

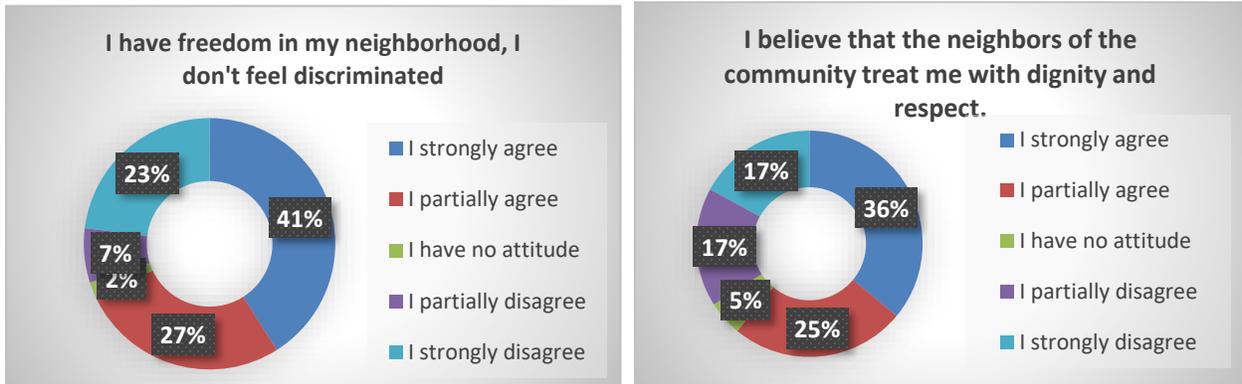


Although there is no potential for conflicts, the question about the possibility of youth cooperation tells us that the situation is not satisfactory, and the majority of respondents remain neutral, as 37% stated that they do not have an opinion, while only 12% strongly believe that there are opportunities for youth cooperation.

Additionally, when asked if there are opportunities to make friends, the majority of respondents, 52% believe that there are no opportunities.

Focus groups and interviews also confirmed that cooperation between young people practically does not exist as most young people move and socialize in their communities. Besides sporadic initiatives and the sports field in Mikronaselje/Kodraminatorëve, there are no places where it is

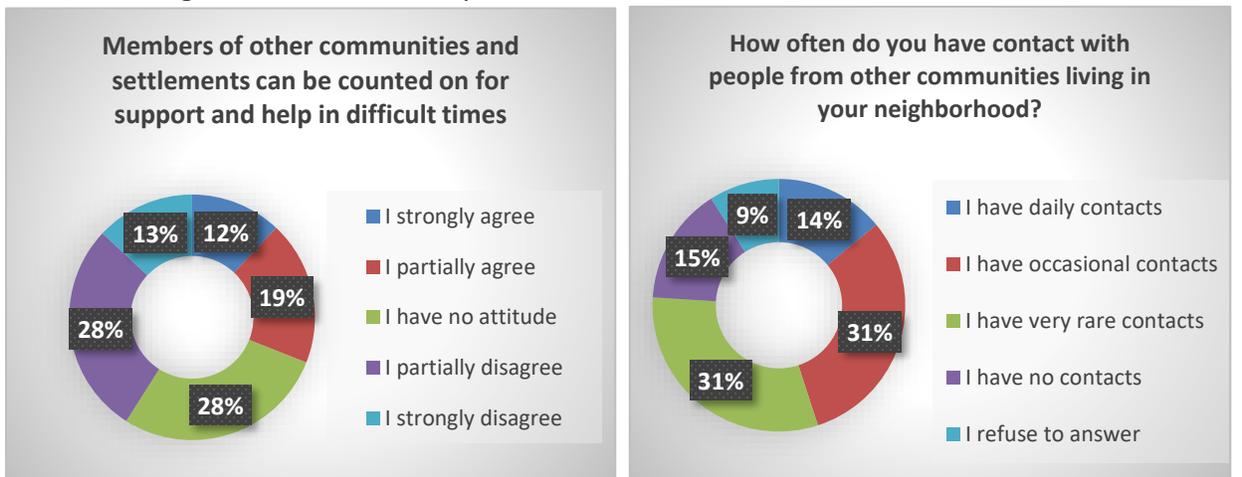
possible for young people to achieve cooperation. This is something that should be seriously worked on in the future.



On the question of whether they feel discriminated against in their neighborhoods and whether neighbors from other communities treat them with respect, the obtained results were unfavorable as about 30% of respondents have a negative attitude to the questions, which is correlated with the fact that there are not enough contacts between the communities. Accordingly, lack of contact leads to a lack of respect.

On the other hand, in the focus groups and interviews, the answers of the participants were different. The participants claimed that there is no discrimination and that people treat each other with respect.

The difference in the results of the questionnaire and the statements in the focus groups may be due to the fact that even though there are no problems between the communities on a personal level, a large number of respondents feel that the situation should be better.



The trust between communities and the belief that they can rely on neighbours from other communities for help if necessary gives similar results as in previous surveys, with approximately 30% of respondents showing more distrust, while only 12% of respondents have full confidence that they can rely on their neighbours from other communities. Similar figures are repeated when asked what kind of relations they have with neighbours from other communities. Namely, 10% responded that relations are like within their community and an additional 8% answered that they can rely on their neighbours.

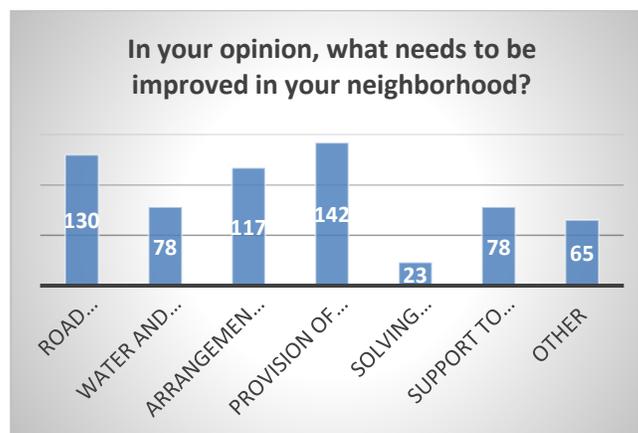
According to the data obtained, only 14% of respondents have daily contact with people from other communities living in their neighbourhood, while 31 have occasional contact.

This percentage was recurring during the research, thus we can say that almost a third of the respondents have a certain reserve towards inter-ethnic relations.



During the focus groups and interviews, the answers were significantly better, but these are people who are quite active in their communities, and because of that, they have more frequent cooperation and better relationships.

Improvement of living conditions



Finally, we asked what needs to change in the community to improve living conditions.

What was repeated during the research was shown in this part as well. The largest number of respondents noted that they need places where young people can socialize and make contact since they previously cited this as the biggest problem. Also, a large number of respondents noted that the repair of the infrastructure in the settlement is crucial for better living conditions in the community. Employment is also mentioned as a big problem.

We received almost identical answers during the focus groups and interviews, with additional problems noted, the problems of employment of members of non-majority communities, information that are not available in official languages, the lack of basic needs in education and health care, as well as the lack of cultural events for members of non-majority communities.

CONCLUSION

What can be concluded from this comprehensive analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, is that situation in the multi-ethnic settlements in North Mitrovica progressed over the years, and that these settlements no longer represent a problem, but rather an advantage that makes the city truly multi-ethnic. The relations between the people living in these settlements have improved, but there is still a dose of distrust that cannot cause conflicts, however, it is necessary to work on building trust. About one-third of respondents still have a reserved attitude towards other communities, which is a significant number. Of particular concern are the relationships of young people who are separated and stick mostly to their community, while the situation is slightly better for older respondents. The lack of places for young people to associate, lack of organized events, as well as problems with not knowing each other's language, especially among young people, represent a serious barrier to improving relations.

The migration of young people from the settlements already represents a problem, and even though there is no decrease in population due to the fact that there are a significant number of newly built buildings, the migration of young people threatens to change the ethnic structure in the future. Therefore, it is crucial to put these settlements in the focus of all institutions and organizations in the future.

It can be concluded that these settlements feel neglected from all sides, and the municipality is criticized for not doing enough to improve the infrastructure. In addition to the large investments that are taking place in the city, these settlements are being bypassed, and the problem of building a large number of residential buildings in these settlements without supporting infrastructure is highlighted. Also, the expectations are higher from the central institutions, especially from the Albanian community. The problems with the school building as well as the problem with health care for the Albanians living in these settlements have not yet been solved in the right way, so they use the services in the municipality of South Mitrovica more often. The support of international and non-governmental organizations, which was important in previous times, has been extremely reduced in the last few years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For civil society and international organizations

- ✓ Provide greater support for multiethnic settlements, with particular support for actions that make people from different communities work together.
- ✓ Provide a specific space for young people in the settlements where cultural and entertainment events could be held.
- ✓ Provide greater attention to capacity building of young people for better participation in public life and strengthen the mechanisms to stop migration processes.
- ✓ Encourage, support, and participate in projects that promote cooperation and dialogue, including seminars and training.
- ✓ Construction and reparation of existing sports fields that can be a place for gatherings of young people.
- ✓ Actively work on building communities and creating trust between citizens of all nationalities.

For Municipality

- ✓ Establishment of missing local-level participation mechanisms and working on strengthening capacities of existing ones.
- ✓ Improving infrastructure in multi-ethnic settlements.
- ✓ Organizing regular meetings with the residents of the settlement, on a monthly or bimonthly level, in order to get to know the problems of the citizens.
- ✓ Improving communication through social networks with residents who speak the Albanian language by translating feeds.
- ✓ Preparation of long-term plans for the development of multi-ethnic settlements through solving specific problems.
- ✓ Take into account greater employment of young people of all communities in the municipality and institutions under the authority of the municipality.

