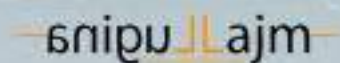


FEBRUARY 2023

FROM TO SHARED CHALLENGES TO SHARED SOLUTIONS





**FROM SHARED CHALLENGES
TO SHARED SOLUTIONS**



CONTENT

Introduction and Context	7
Background and Methodology	9
Demographics	11
Research results	15
Conclusions	33

This study has been funded by PCI as part of the ALVED project; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect PCI's official policy

Introduction and Context

The research conducted within the scope of the project “From Shared Challenges to Shared Solutions” aimed to examine the problems faced by Serbs in the four municipalities that comprise north Kosovo, and Albanians living in the Preševo Valley in south Serbia. Both groups occupy a unique territorial, social, cultural and political space in that while they are, in a broader sense, minorities in Kosovo and Serbia respectively, they constitute a majority or near-majority in the regions covered by this research. Nevertheless, they both face a specific set of barriers and challenges when it comes to their relationship with local and central-level governing bodies, as well as with navigating a future in a post-conflict ecosystem that is often marked with extended periods of uncertainty and indeed sporadic incidents of violence.

Following cessation of armed hostilities in Kosovo in 1999 and the insurgency in the Preševo Valley in 2001, ensuing settlements¹ led to an often precarious peace, neither of which necessarily succeeded in fostering long-term inter-ethnic cohabitation or reconciliation. The signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013 marked a sea change for the north of Kosovo, which brought about the ‘integration’ of institutional structures, namely the creation of municipal administrations (North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Leposavić and Zubin Potok) that operate within Kosovo’s legal and constitutional framework. Despite this, Kosovo Serbs have been subjected to various forms of institutionalized discrimination, particularly when it comes to access to services, language use, as well as obtaining identity documents.² Similarly, and as the results of this research show, Albanians living in the Preševo Valley in south Serbia also face numerous barriers, particularly when it comes to their relationship with both local and central-level governing structures.

Both Serbia and Kosovo have passed laws that recognize and give minority communities the right to develop their identities, use their native languages (officially and unofficially), protect their cultural heritage and provides legal protection from discriminatory practices³. In Kosovo’s case, the scope and breadth of these legal frameworks is wider than in the case of Serbia, particularly when it comes to language rights,⁴ as the Serbian language is (theoretically) granted equal status to Albanian in terms of its use at an official level. Minority languages are protected in Serbia by the *Law on the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities* and is a signatory to the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, both of which foresee the use of minority languages in areas where they have a historical presence. Despite this, in both cases, implementation is widely seen as lacking, with Kosovo Serbs and Albanians in Serbia reporting widespread violations of relevant legislation that govern language rights, particularly in the court system.⁵⁶

Therefore, and can be seen in the results of qualitative research presented in the ensuing sections of this report, both communities face a wide range of difficulties in their relationship with governing organs, and indeed in exercising their legally-guaranteed rights in their daily lives.

¹ The conflict in Kosovo resulted in the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement in June of 1999 and the insurgency in the Preševo Valley was terminated by the signing of the Končulj Agreement in 2002

² See: *Annual Report on the Status of the Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo*. NGO AKTIV, North Mitrovica 2022.

³ In Kosovo, these rights are guaranteed under the constitution and regulated by a series of subsequent legislative acts that include, but are not limited to, the Law on the Use of Languages, Law on Anti-Discrimination and the Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage. In Serbia, the Law on Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities also provides guarantees the right of minorities to foster their cultural/ethnic identities and, at the level of local governance in certain municipalities where they have a historic presence, to services in their native languages.

⁴ The Constitution and Law on the Use of Languages theoretically guarantee the absolute equality of the Serbian and Albanian languages at all levels of governance.

⁵ *Report on the Application of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Serbia*, 2013, pg. 24.

⁶ *Annual Report on the Status of the Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo*. NGO AKTIV, North Mitrovica 2022.

Background and Methodology

This research was carried out within the scope of a project implemented by the *Center for Democracy and Education – Lugina* in Bujanovac and NGO *AKTIV* in North Mitrovica. The overriding goal is to conduct a comparative analysis on the position of Serbian Community in the four northern municipalities of Kosovo and the Albanian Community in Preševo Valley in south Serbia. More specifically, the aim was to carry out public opinion (quantitative) research that would zero in on the main challenges that the two respective communities share and design a set of recommendations for further actions directed at the local and central governments, the international community, as well as media and civil society.

The research examined the following areas:

- Citizens' integration, participation, and communication with the local and central governments
- Freedom of movement between Kosovo and Serbia (personal documents and vehicle plates)
- Use of languages
- Youth perspectives

In order to develop mixed research methods (quantitative and qualitative) and comparative analysis, in order to obtain data as much as possible accurate about the problems faced by Albanians in the Preševo valley and Serbs in the north of Kosovo.



Demographics

Gender of respondents:

Preševo Valley
51.9%

Preševo Valley
48.1%

FEMALE

MALE

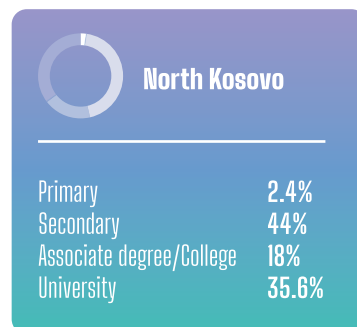
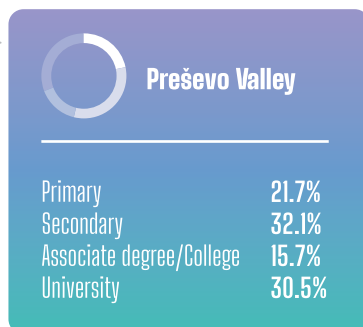


53.7%
North Kosovo

46.3%
North Kosovo

Average age of the respondents: Preševo Valley and north of Kosovo - 40 years of

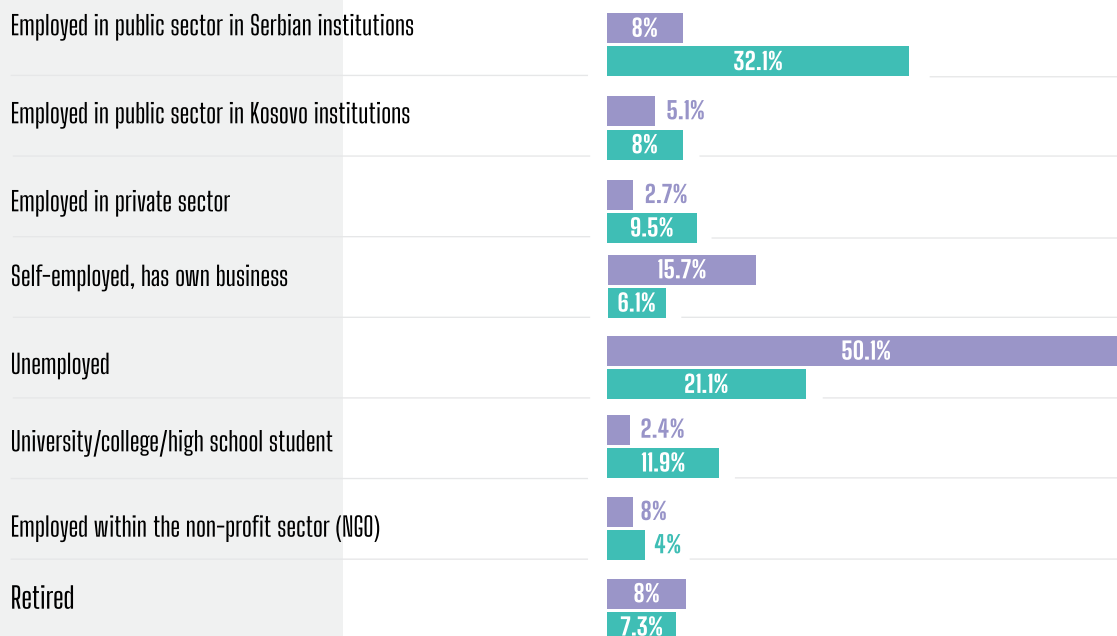
Level of Education



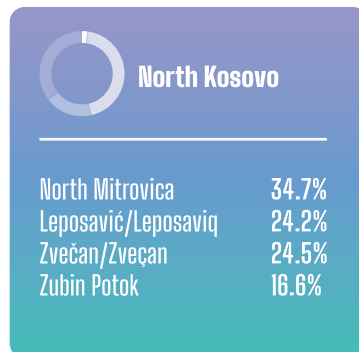
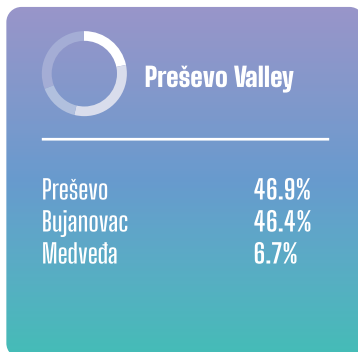
Your employment status:

● Preševo Valley

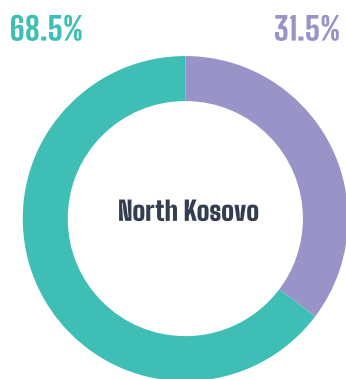
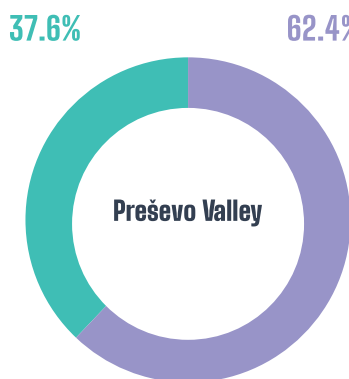
● North Kosovo



Place of residence:



Type of residence



- Urban (city)
- Rural (village)



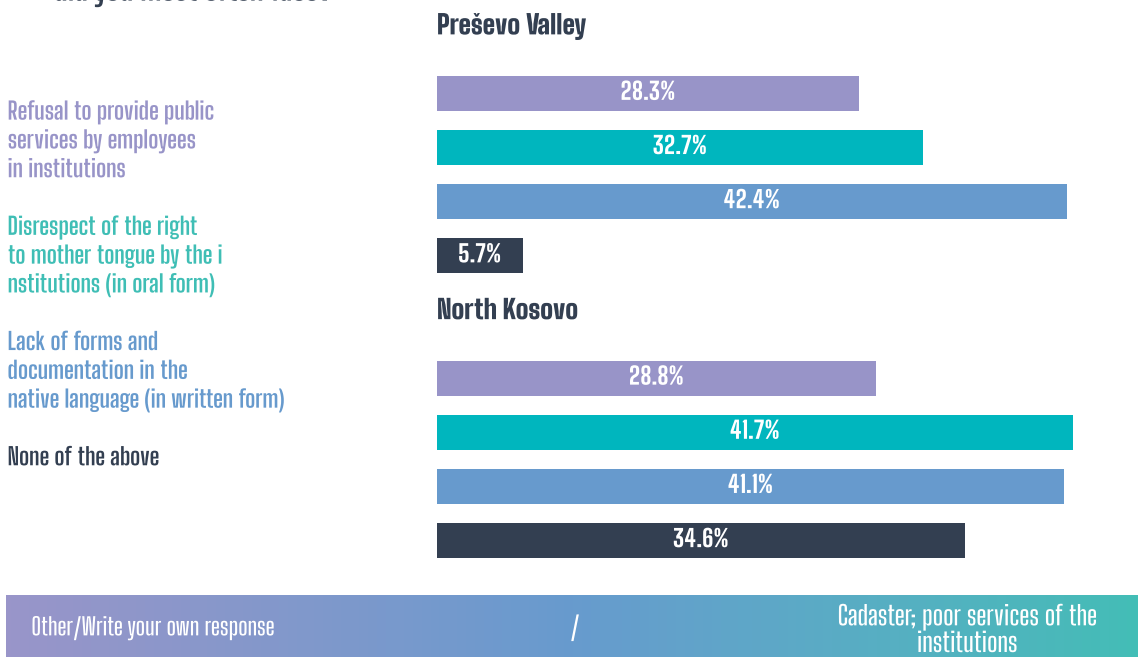
Research Results

What types of media do you use most frequently to get the information?



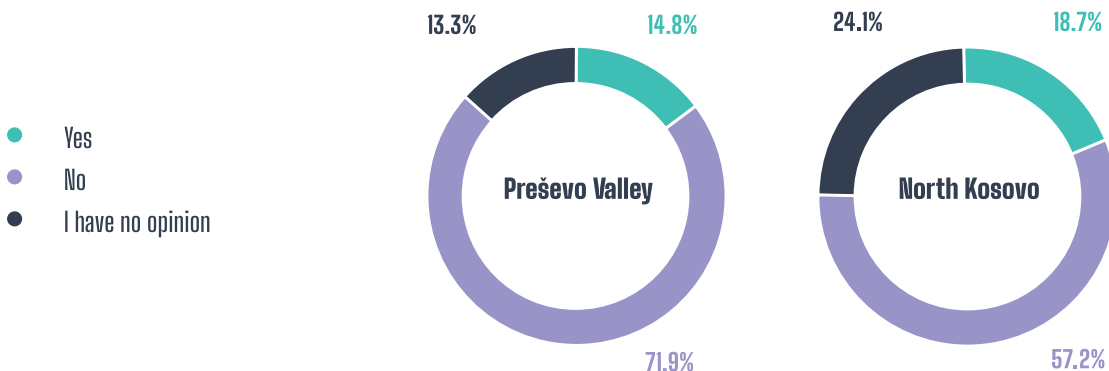
A comparative analysis shows that respondents from Preševo Valley are getting their information more through traditional media and social media than the ones in the north of Kosovo, while respondents from the north of Kosovo, compared to respondents from the Preševo Valley, are getting their information more through Internet portals of media outlets.

Speaking generally about the respect of rights of the Albanian community in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa by the institutions / respect of right for Serbian community in the north of Kosovo by the institutions (at the central and local level), what problems/obstacles did you most often face?



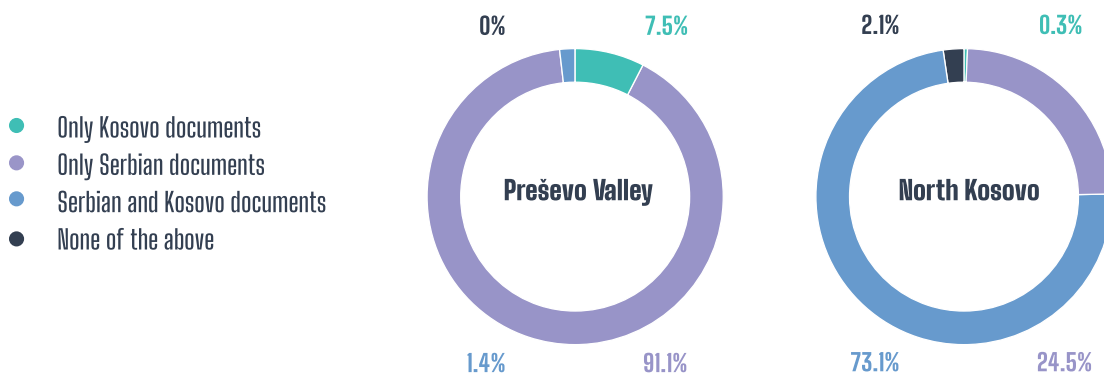
There are no significant differences between respondents from the Preševo Valley and the north of Kosovo, when it comes to the respect of rights, such as the refusal to provide public services and the lack of written forms/documentation in the native language. However, it is noticeable that the rights of the Serbian community in the north of Kosovo were violated more often in terms of failure of institutions to respect the right to mother tongue in oral form.

3 Do you personally think that access to information and public services in your native language that is guaranteed by the law is respected at the local level, and are you satisfied with the services that are being provided by local institutions?



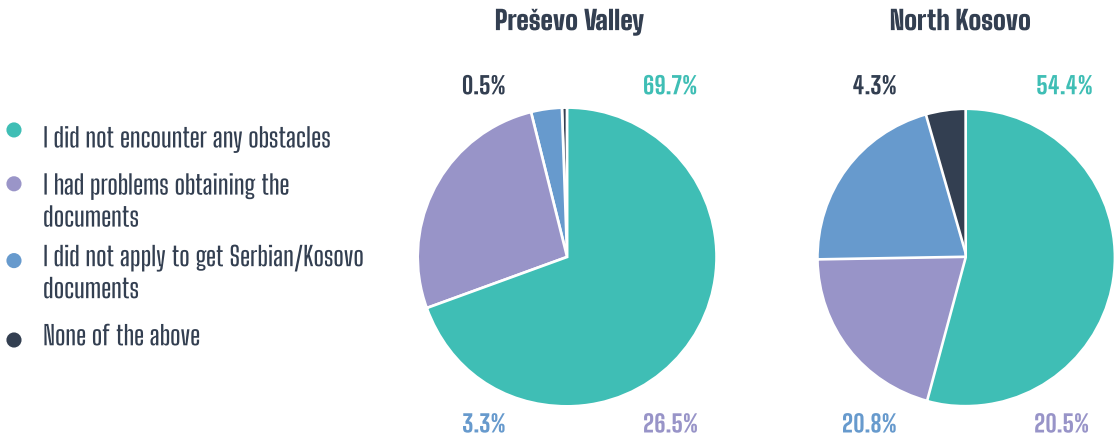
Respondents from Preševo Valley believe, to a significantly greater extent than respondents from the north of Kosovo, that the laws which guarantee access to information and public services in the native language are not respected at the local level.

4 How many identification documents (ID card and/or passport) you personally possess?



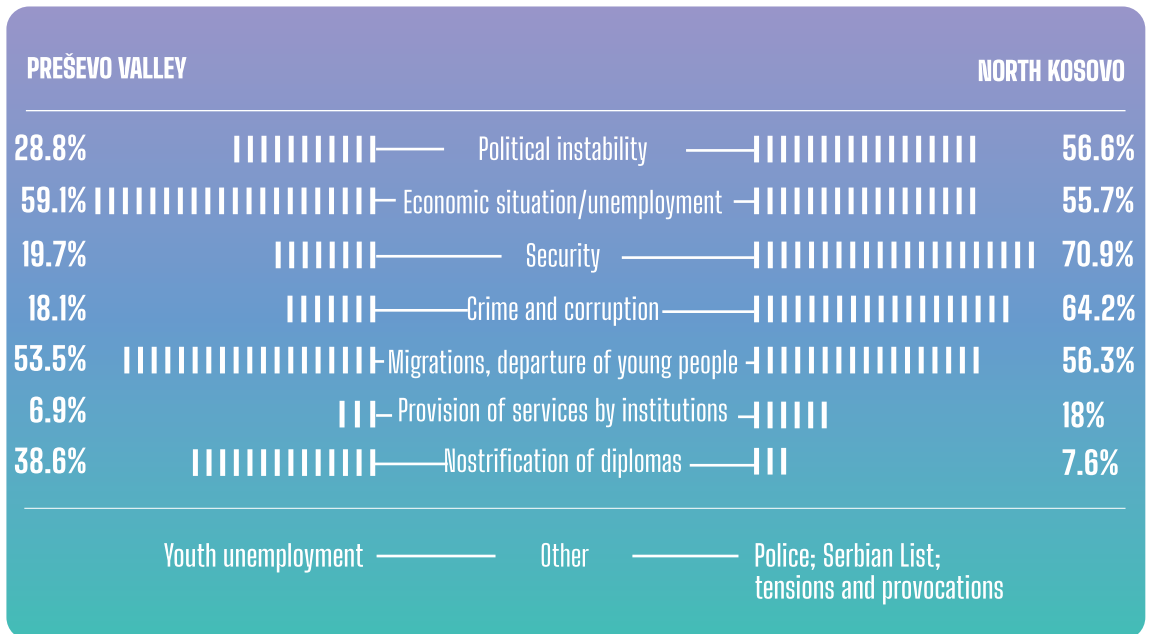
Research results point to a specific difference when it comes to identity documents between respondents from the Preševo Valley and the north of Kosovo. Namely, respondents from the Preševo Valley predominantly possess documents issued by the institutions of the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, respondents from the north of Kosovo predominantly possess documents issued by both Serbian and Kosovo institutions. However, every fourth respondent from the north of Kosovo has only Serbian documents.

5 When it comes to access to Serbian documents / Kosovo documents, did you have any problems applying and/or obtaining them?



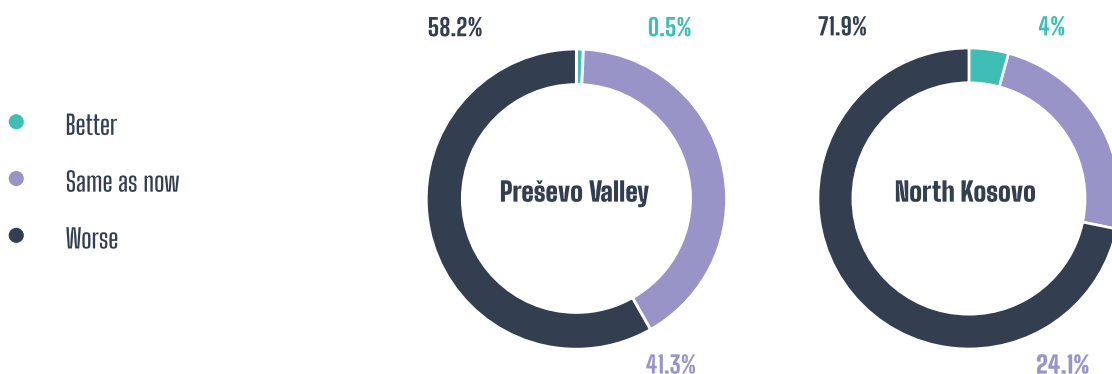
The data show that respondents from the Preševo Valley encountered problems slightly more often when applying for Serbian documents, than the respondents from the north of Kosovo when they tried to obtain documents from Kosovo institutions. It is noticeable that every fifth respondent from the north of Kosovo did not apply for Kosovo documents, while on the other hand, a very small number of respondents from the Preševo Valley did not apply for Serbian documents.

6 In your opinion, what is the biggest problem in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa / in the municipalities in the north of Kosovo?



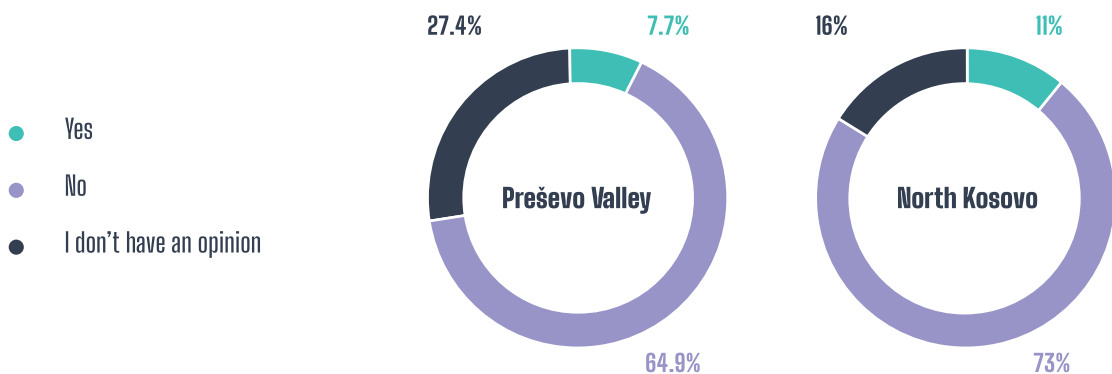
For respondents from the Preševo Valley, the biggest problems are (1) the economic situation and unemployment, (2) migration and the departure of young people, and (3) nostrification of diplomas. On the other hand, for respondents from the north of Kosovo, the biggest problems they face are (1) threatened security, (2) crime and corruption and (3) political instability / economic situation and unemployment / migration and departure of young people (these three problems have almost identical frequency).

7 In your opinion, life for Albanians in the Preševo Valley/ life for Serbs in the north of Kosovo in three years' time will be:



The data obtained from the comparative analysis highlight a pronounced pessimism when it comes to the quality of life in the near future, both in the north of Kosovo and in Preševo Valley. In comparison with the respondents from Preševo Valley, significantly higher number of respondents from the north of Kosovo believe that life for Serbs in the north of Kosovo will be worse in the next three years. This view is shared by 7 out of 10 respondents from the north of Kosovo. On the other hand, 6 out of 10 respondents from the Preševo Valley believe that life for Albanians in the Preševo Valley will be worse in the next three years.

Question for young people (from 18 to 29 years of age): Do you see (your) future (in the next three years) in Serbia/in Kosovo?



The consequence of pessimism and the lack of faith in a better quality of life in both areas (in Preševo Valley and in the north of Kosovo) consequently leads to an increase in the motivation for emigration among young respondents. Slightly more respondents in the north of Kosovo, compared to Preševo Valley, are contemplating to leave their place/country of residence in the next three years.

9 Sub-question for young people (18 to 29 years old): What are the preconditions that should be met, so that you would decide to stay and build your future in Serbia / in Kosovo?

	Preševo Valley	North Kosovo
Improved security situation at the local level	28.7%	37.4%
Complete integration of Albanians into the Serbian system	14.7%	1%
Significant improvement of the economic situation at the local level (through public investments)	31.7%	42.4%
Integration of the Preševo Valley into Kosovo (in the form of territorial exchange)	21%	6.1%
Drastic reduction of corruption and nepotism in the operation and functioning of local institutions	31.1%	42.4%
A significant reduction of prevalence of nationalist rhetoric in the speeches of politicians and social actors	15.3%	19.2%
Reaching a final and comprehensive agreement between Belgrade and Pristina	26.3%	26.3%
Other	Preševo Valley /	North Kosovo Crime reduction; more employment opportunities; respect for the rights

The most important prerequisites for young respondents from Preševo Valley to remain in Serbia are (1) Significant improvement of the economic situation at the local level (through public investments), (2) Drastic reduction of corruption and nepotism in the operation and functioning of local institutions and (3) Improved security situation at the local level. For young respondents from the north of Kosovo, the most important preconditions so that they would remain in Kosovo are (1) Drastic reduction of corruption and nepotism in the operation and functioning of local institutions, (2) Significant improvement of the economic situation at the local level (through public investments) and (3) Improved security situation at the local level. For both groups of young people, the achievement of a final and comprehensive agreement between Belgrade and Pristina ranks fourth.

10 In your opinion, what are the preconditions that must be fulfilled to improve the economic situation in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda / municipalities in the north of Kosovo?

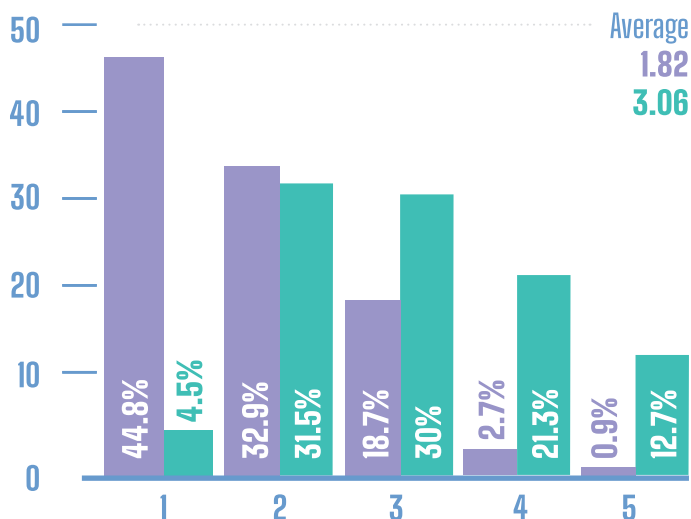
	Preševo Valley	North Kosovo
More transparent and responsible work of institutions and individuals working there	27.2%	38.7%
A more effective fight against corruption and nepotism	49.7%	68.4%
Increased public investments at the local level	19.1%	19.3%
Financial assistance to private entrepreneurs at the local level	13.7%	20.9%
Facilitated procedures for conduct of business	13.9%	21.1%
Better security environment	16.9%	34.6%
Development of a local government plan for long-term economic development	12.4%	30.4%
A more adequately implemented process of institutional integration	10.4%	4.9%
Clearer commitment of decision-makers at the central level to improve economic conditions in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda	35.9%	19.3%
Other:	Preševo Valley	North Kosovo
	Opening of factories	More investments from Serbia; bigger employment opportunities
None of the above	1.2%	4.3%

As the most important preconditions that could lead to an improvement of the economic situation in the Preševo Valley, the respondents identified (1) A more effective fight against corruption and nepotism, (2) A clearer commitment of decision makers at the central level to improve the economic conditions in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda and (3) More transparent and responsible work of institutions and individuals working there. On the other hand, respondents from the north of Kosovo highlighted the following as the most important prerequisites that could lead to the improvement of the economic situation in the north of Kosovo: (1) More effective fight against corruption and nepotism, (2) More transparent and responsible work of institutions and individuals working in them and (3) Better security environment.

On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “extremely bad” and 5 is “excellent”, rate the current state of inter-ethnic relations between communities in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa / communities in northern Kosovo municipalities?

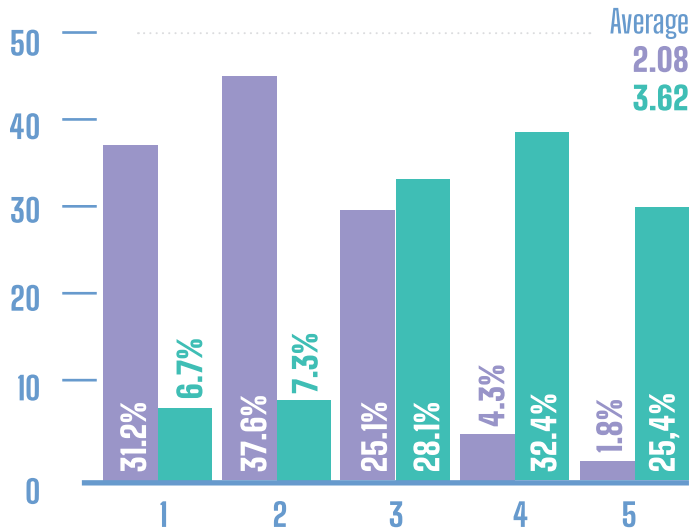
Preševo Valley

- Albanians and Serbs
- Albanians and other nationalities in your local area



North Kosovo

- Serbs and Albanians
- Serbs and other nationalities in your local area



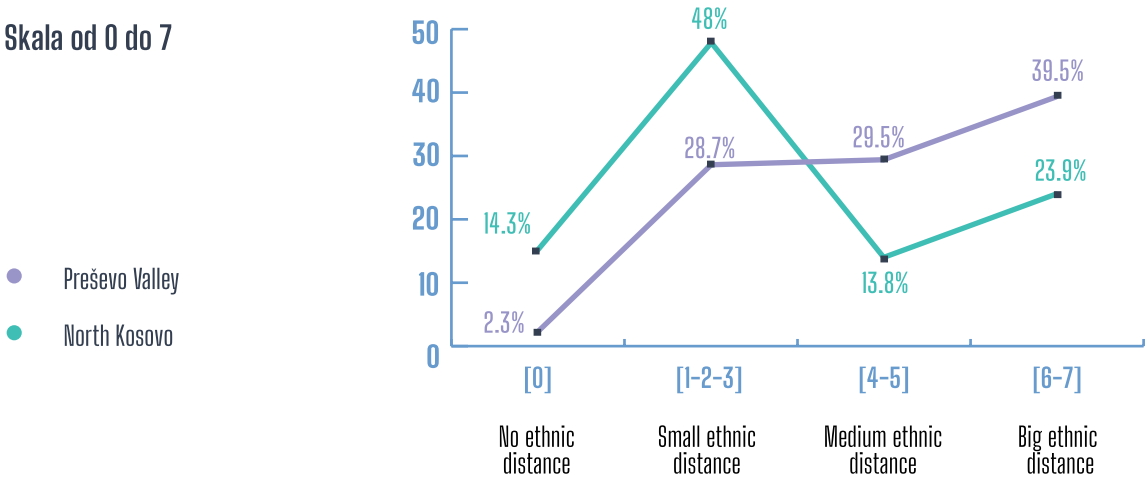
Data from the survey show that respondents from the north of Kosovo rate the relations between Serbs and Albanians, as well as Serbs and other nationalities as better, compared to the respondents from the Preševo Valley and how they rated the relations between Albanians and Serbs, as well as Albanians and other nationalities. The difference is especially pronounced when we talk about relations between Serbs and Albanians and members of other nationalities, where we can see that the relations of Serbs with other nationalities in the north of Kosovo are rated better (57.8%), than the relations of Albanians with other nationalities in the Preševo Valley(34%).

10 In the following table, there are seven different types of contacts that you can make with members of Serbian/ Albanian nationality. Please respond for each of them based on your first impression. You reply with YES or NO.

Would you accept to have a member of the Serbian /Albanian nationality as:

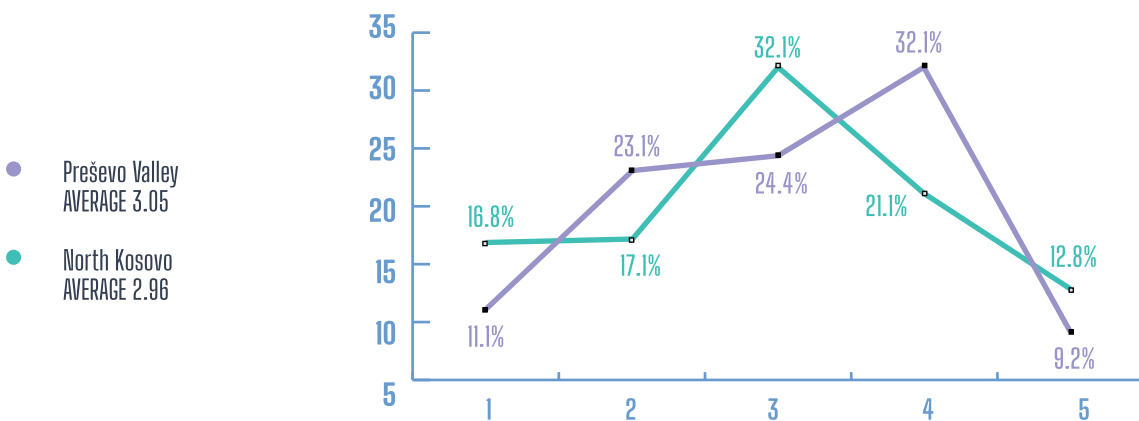
	Preševo Valley		North Kosovo	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Your spouse	6.1%	93.9%	19.3%	80.7%
Son-in-law /daughter-in-law	6.1%	93.9%	25.8%	74.2%
Your friend	53.2%	46.8%	56.7%	43.3%
Your colleague	61.6%	38.4%	77%	23%
Your superior at work	38.8%	61.2%	64.9%	35.1%
High ranking official in the government	30.7%	69.3%	62.3%	37.7%
Person living in your neighborhood	41%	59%	65%	35%

Skala od 0 do 7



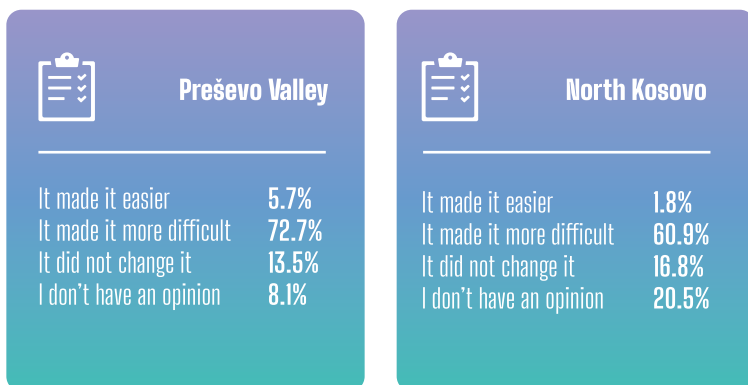
Insights from the research show that ethnic distance is more pronounced among respondents in the Preševo Valley than among respondents in the north of Kosovo. There are almost six times more respondents without ethnic distance in the north of Kosovo than in the Preševo Valley . Also, almost every other respondent in the north of Kosovo has an ethnic distance of low intensity. On the other hand, 7 out of 10 respondents in the Preševo Valley have a high degree of ethnic distance, compared to every fourth respondent from the north of Kosovo.

13 To what extent are you familiar with the Agreement on Freedom of Movement and its implementation (use of travel documents, travel documents for minors, driver's licenses, etc.)?



According to the research findings, it seems that there are no big differences when it comes to the extent to which the respondents are informed about the Agreement on Freedom of Movement and its implementation, although it is noticeable that respondents from the north of Kosovo are somewhat less familiar with the Agreement.

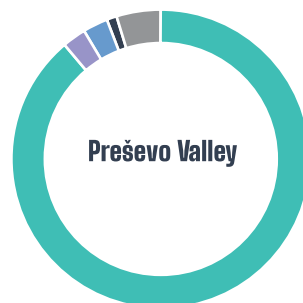
1 Did the introduction of the sticker regime affect freedom of movement, and to what extent, compared to the previous period (without stickers)?



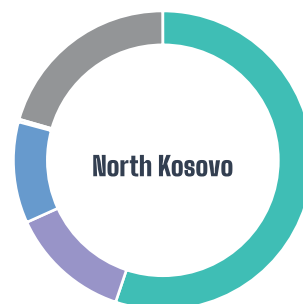
Respondents from Preševo Valley and the north of Kosovo share the view that the introduction of the sticker regime has made freedom of movement more difficult. A total of 7 out of 10 respondents from the Preševo Valley share this view along with 6 out of 10 respondents from the north of Kosovo.

1 In the last year, while traveling from Kosovo to Serbia and vice versa, were you exposed to an unpleasant situation (caused by the law enforcement authorities) or were you prevented from crossing?

- I did not experience any inconvenience **89%**
- I experienced an inconvenience **2.6%**
 - Because of the documents; because of the COVID-19 vaccine; detailed search of persons and luggage
- I was prevented from crossing **2.8%**
- Something else: Certificate of COVID-19 vaccination; No ID **1.2%**
- I have not traveled between Kosovo and Serbia **4.4%**



- I did not experience any inconvenience **55%**
- I experienced an inconvenience **14.1%**
 - Problems with stickers; bad treatment by police officers
- I was prevented from crossing **10.7%**
- Something else: Certificate of COVID-19 vaccination; No ID **0%**
- I have not traveled between Kosovo and Serbia **20.2%**



The data show that a significantly larger number of respondents from the north of Kosovo found themselves in an unpleasant situation when traveling (Kosovo-Serbia) compared to the respondents from the Preševo Valley. Also, respondents from the north of Kosovo were prevented from crossing significantly more often than respondents from the Preševo Valley. The data also show that every fifth respondent from the north of Kosovo has not traveled to Serbia in the last year.

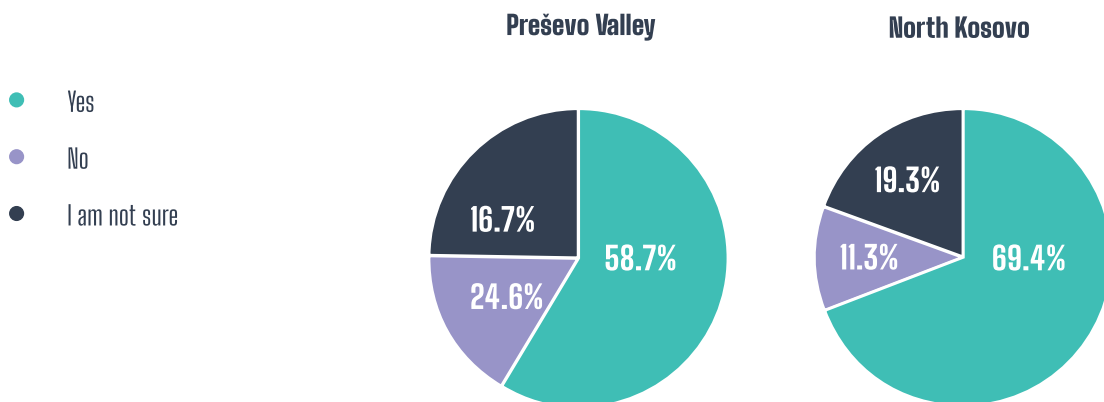
16 In your opinion, what are the factors that influence your perception of threats to personal safety at the local level?

	Preševo Valley	North Kosovo
The inflammatory/nationalist vocabulary of politicians (decision-makers) and prominent social actors	46.3%	48.6%
Security/interethnic incidents in Kosovo and/or Serbia	15.3%	63.3%
Illegal migratory movements at the local level	12.7%	5.8%
Consequences of decisions made within the process of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina	22.7%	45.6%
Natural disasters	13.2%	1.8%
Political instability in Kosovo and/or Serbia	24.4%	38.2%
Media headlines in which members of your community are labeled in an offensive manner	14.5%	30%
Other	Preševo Valley /	North Kosovo Behavior of the police
None of the above	1.5%	5.8%

The perception of what constitutes a threat to personal security at the local level among respondents in Preševo Valley is most influenced by (1) Inflammatory/nationalist vocabulary of politicians (decision-makers) and prominent social actors, (2) Political instability in Kosovo and/or Serbia and (3) Consequences of decisions that were made within the process of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

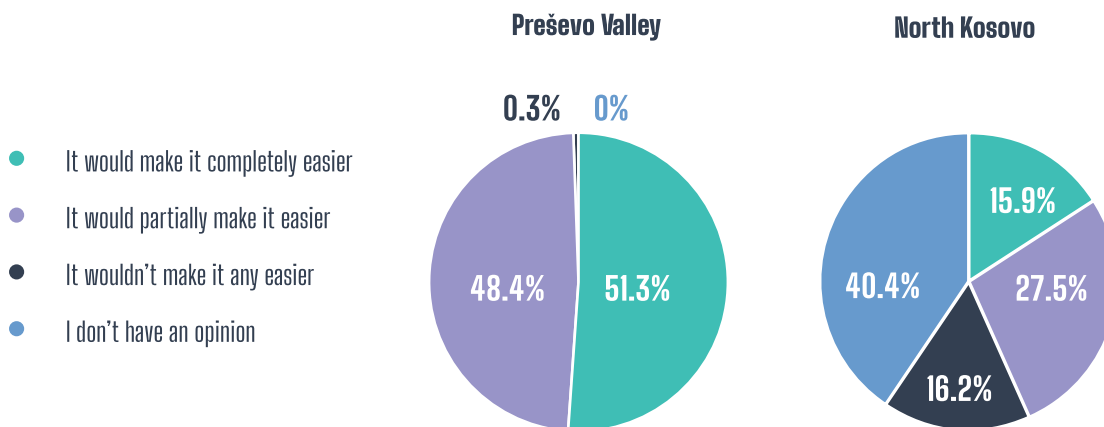
On the other hand, the perception of threats to personal security at the local level among respondents in the north of Kosovo is mostly influenced by (1) Security/interethnic incidents in Kosovo and/or Serbia, (2) Inflammatory/nationalist vocabulary of politicians (decision-makers) and prominent social actors and (3) Consequences of decisions that were made within the process of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

17 Do you think that the political representatives of Albanians from the Preševo Valley / political representatives of Serbs from (north) Kosovo should directly participate and be represented in the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina?



Respondents from Preševo Valley and from the north of Kosovo share the view that political representatives from their local areas should directly participate and be represented in the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina. It is noticeable that the percentage of those who share this view is somewhat higher among the respondents from the north of Kosovo.

18 In what way would mutual recognition of diplomas (verification/nostrification of diplomas) obtained in Kosovo / in the Serbian education system facilitate the process of employment and professional mobility within and outside of Serbia / Kosovo?



A comparative analysis of the responses to this question shows a more pronounced interest and need among respondents from the Preševo Valley to solve the problem of nostrification of diplomas. Almost every respondent from the Preševo Valley stated that solving the problem of nostrification of diplomas would facilitate the process of employment and professional mobility. On the other hand, 43.4% of the respondents from the north of Kosovo share that view, but also 40% of the respondents from the north of Kosovo did not adopt a view on this issue.

Which socio-political factors do you trust the most from the ones listed below?

	Preševo Valley	North Kosovo
Government of Kosovo	64.3%	1.2%
Government of Serbia	8.3%	21.8%
President of Kosovo	37.3%	0.6%
President of Serbia	6.3%	17.7%
Coordination Body for Preševo Valley / Office for Kosovo and Metohija	12.5%	4.9%
The mayor of your home municipality in the Preševo Valley/ in northern Kosovo	13.2%	1.5%
Coalition of Albanians of the Valley and/or Alternative for Changes / Serbian List	21.7%	2.4%
Opposition political actors	1.2%	1.8%
Serbian-language media	2.7%	2.8%
Albanian-language media	17.5%	0.3%
Local non-governmental organizations	0.3%	11.6%
None of the above	0.5%	50.8%

Respondents from the Preševo Valley have the most trust in (1) the Government of Kosovo, (2) President of Kosovo and (3) Albanian-language media. On the other hand, respondents from the north of Kosovo have the most trust in (1) the Government of Serbia, (2) President of Serbia and (3) Local NGOs. It is particularly important that every second respondent from the north of Kosovo stated that they do not trust any of the listed institutions.

2 On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “I don’t trust at all” and 5 means “I fully trust”, how much do you trust:

Preševo Valley

Republic Electoral Commission - AVERAGE 2.59



Police - AVERAGE 2.66



Judicial authorities - AVERAGE 2.6



Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) - AVERAGE 2.74



North Kosovo

Republic Electoral Commission - AVERAGE 1.72



Police - AVERAGE 1.67



Judicial authorities - AVERAGE 1.94



Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) - AVERAGE 2.2



When it comes to the aforementioned institutions, the research shows that respondents from the Preševo Valley have a higher degree of trust than respondents from the north of Kosovo. Respondents from the Preševo Valley, as well as respondents from the north of Kosovo, trust the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsperson) the most. Respondents from the Preševo Valley have the least trust in the Republic Electoral Commission, while respondents from the north of Kosovo trust the police the least.

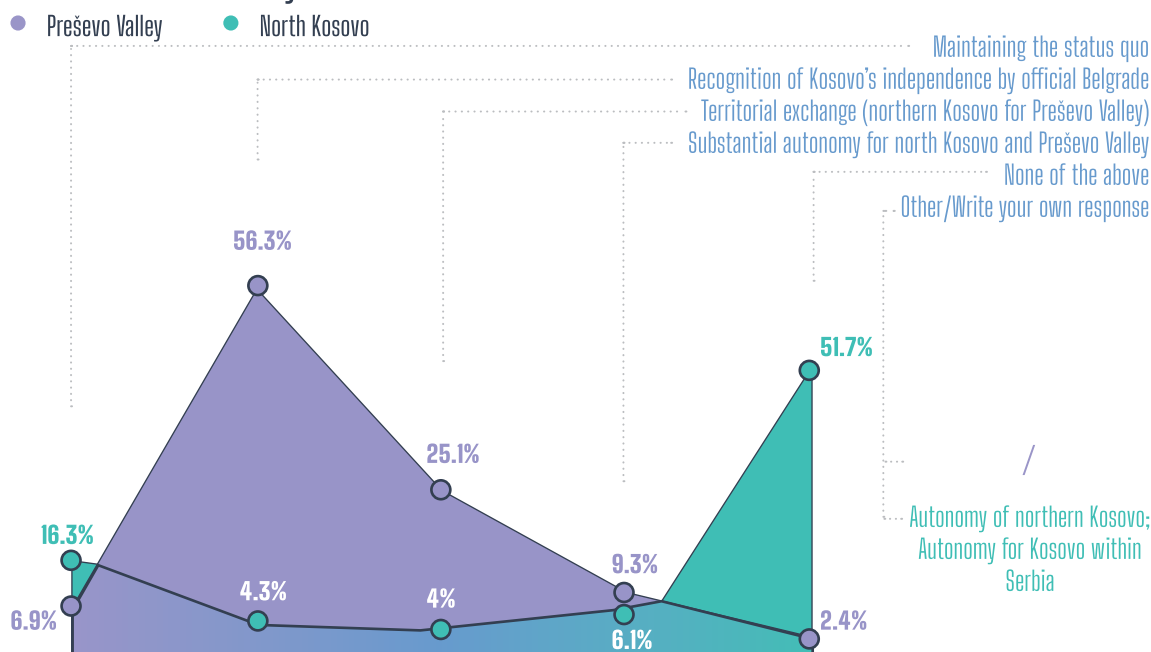
21 Of all international entities that are listed here, which do you trust the most when it comes to (potential) promotion and improvement of the rights of your community?

Preševo Valley	
European Union (EU)	35.2%
usa	67%
OSCE	7.9%
United Nations (UN)	9.3%
NATO	47.5%
Other	/
None of the above	0.5%

North Kosovo	
European Union (EU)	7.4%
usa	9.8%
OSCE	2.1%
United Nations (UN)	20.5%
NATO	3.7%
Other	KFOR; Russia
None of the above	58.7%

Respondents from the Preševo Valley trust the following the most: (1) USA, (2) EU and (3) NATO. On the other hand, respondents from the north of Kosovo have the most faith in (1) the UN (2) USA and (3) the EU. However, the differences in the degree of trust are very large, especially when we talk about trusting the USA, NATO and the EU. In addition, almost 60% of respondents from the north of Kosovo state that they do not trust any of the listed actors.

22 Which of the offered scenarios of a possible comprehensive agreement between Belgrade and Pristina would be the most acceptable for the Albanian community in Preševo Valley / for the Serbian community in the north of Kosovo?



When it comes to possible scenarios of a comprehensive agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, we see significant differences between respondents from Preševo Valley and north Kosovo. For the most part, respondents from the north of Kosovo reject all of the offered responses, and besides, the only scenario that received a double-digit percentage of support is the maintenance of the status quo. On the other hand, respondents from the Preševo Valley mostly support the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the official Belgrade. Also, every fourth respondent from the Preševo Valley supports the scenario that implies the territorial swap (north of Kosovo for the Preševo Valley). A small percentage of respondents from Preševo Valley supports the *status quo*.

Conclusions

It can be gleaned from this results that Serbs in the north of Kosovo and Albanians in Preševo Valley see themselves as having a number of shared problems – with the very notable exception of safety and security, which is, for perhaps understandable reasons, a matter of much greater concern to Serbs in the north. Similar numbers (around 40%) of respondents from each group reported issues receiving in-person services or (written) information in their native tongue, something that is indicative of more widespread and deeper institutional problems in ensuring the implementation of legislation that governs and regulates the rights of minority communities. Also interesting is the fact that there appears to be widespread pessimism when it comes to material wellbeing, economic questions and employment prospects. Indeed, a large percentage of respondents from both communities cited unemployment and outward migration as some of the most significant challenges that they face. This has generated a sense of apathy, disillusionment and mistrust in institutional and political actors, and a widespread belief that, in general, living conditions will worsen over the next several years. Furthermore, ethnic distance between Serbs and Albanians (both in Serbia and in Kosovo) remains notable, but could perhaps be seen as somewhat of a bright spot, in the sense that relatively high number of respondents signaled at openness so having personal connections with members of the other group.

When it comes to policy formulation, the key question is the extent to which citizens' concerns are taken into consideration in decision-making processes and whether or not their political representatives have articulated collective needs in a manner that can translate to tangible (positive) changes in current living conditions. In this regard, there appears to be a shared dissatisfaction with the overall direction of socio-political developments, much of which may result from a lack of active inclusion and engagement in processes (such as the dialogue process, when talking about Kosovo Serbs) that have a significant impact on their livelihoods. In that sense, and taking into due consideration shared concerns and problems, it would be beneficial to greater stronger links between the communities in Preševo Valley and north Kosovo, in the goal of establishing channels of collaboration and information exchange, as well as increasing the level of understanding between them.

