



Eurofound

Quality of life in enlargement countries

Third European Quality of Life Survey – Serbia

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Country codes

EU27

The order of countries follows the EU protocol based on the alphabetical order of the geographical names of countries in their original language.

BE	Belgium	FR	France	AT	Austria
BG	Bulgaria	IT	Italy	PL	Poland
CZ	Czech Republic	CY	Cyprus	PT	Portugal
DK	Denmark	LV	Latvia	RO	Romania
DE	Germany	LT	Lithuania	SI	Slovenia
EE	Estonia	LU	Luxembourg	SK	Slovakia
IE	Ireland	HU	Hungary	FI	Finland
EL	Greece	MT	Malta	SE	Sweden
ES	Spain	NL	Netherlands	UK	United Kingdom

Enlargement countries

HR	Croatia	IS	Iceland
ME	Montenegro	MK	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ¹
RS	Serbia	TR	Turkey
XK	Kosovo ²		

¹ MK corresponds to ISO code 3166. This is a provisional code that does not prejudice in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country, which will be agreed following the conclusion of negotiations currently taking place under the auspices of the United Nations (http://www.iso.org/iso.country_codes/iso_3166_code_lists.htm).

² This code is used for practical purposes and is not an official ISO code.

This paper is one in a series on EU enlargement countries covered by the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) 2012: Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. For background information including survey characteristics and definitions of indicators reported in this paper, please consult [Quality of life in enlargement countries: Third European Quality of Life Survey – Introduction](#).

Table 1: *Demographic profile, 2007, 2009 and 2012*

	2007	2009	2012
Population (1 January)	7,397,651	7,334,937	7,241,295
Age structure: people <15 years as % of total	15.6	15.3	14.9
Age structure: people 15–64 years as % of total	67.2	67.6	68.2
Age structure: people 65+ years as % of total	17.2	17.1	16.9
Women per 100 men	105.7	105.7	105.6
Life expectancy at birth, men	n.a.	71	n.a.
Life expectancy at birth, women	n.a.	76	n.a.

Note: n.a. = not available.

Subjective well-being

Table 2: *Subjective well-being*

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries				EU27
		Minimum		Maximum		
Life satisfaction (scale of 1–10)	6.3	Bulgaria	5.5	Denmark	8.4	7.1
Happiness (scale of 1–10)	7.1	Bulgaria	6.3	Iceland	8.3	7.4
Optimism about the future (% ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’)	60%	Greece	20%	Iceland	87%	52%

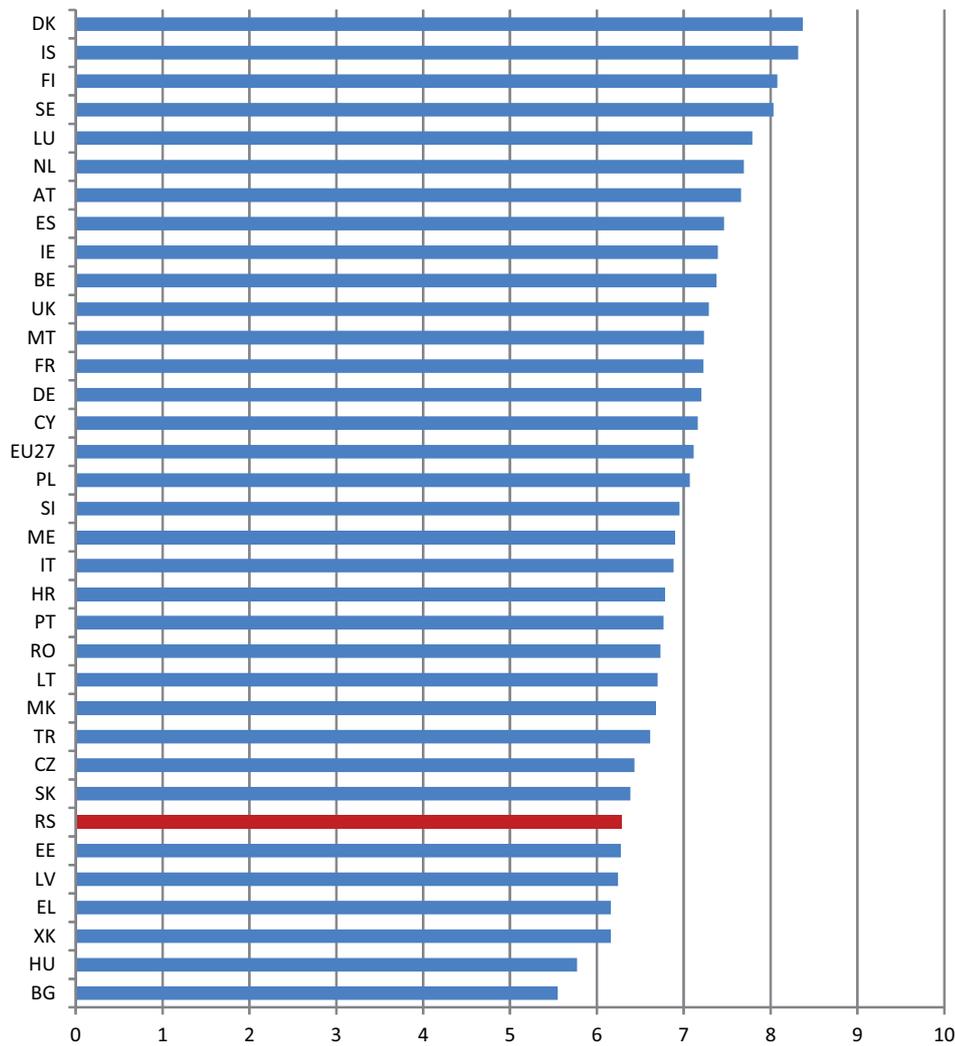
One way of measuring a society’s progress is by assessing the subjective well-being of its citizens, to complement the more usual economic information such as gross domestic product (GDP). In this report, three subjective well-being measures are examined: life satisfaction, happiness and optimism.

On average, people in Serbia rate their life satisfaction at 6.3 on a scale of 1 to 10 (Figure 1). This is far below the average of 7.1 for the EU27, where life satisfaction levels range from 5.5 in Bulgaria to 8.4 in Denmark. In comparison with other surveyed enlargement countries, the figure for Serbia is just above the lowest score, recorded in Kosovo (6.2).

The EQLS overview report shows that health, income, unemployment and age have the most significant association with subjective well-being in the EU (Eurofound, 2012). Data analysis points to similar associations in Serbia, although unemployment is a less powerful predictor than it is in the EU27.

Like in most countries, people in Serbia generally rate their satisfaction with life less positively than their happiness (7.1), where the gap between the two indicators of subjective well-being is -0.8. Research suggests that people, particularly those in countries where life satisfaction is low, are able to compensate for dissatisfaction with their quality of life through, for instance, family relationships and personal adjustments. In Serbia, satisfaction with family life (8.0) is slightly higher than it is in the EU27 (7.8).

Figure 1: *Life satisfaction*



Note: Scale of 1–10.

In Serbia 60% of people are optimistic about the future, which is above the EU27 average of 52%. The other surveyed enlargement countries also show higher levels of optimism; however, in some neighbouring countries it is much higher. Since levels of optimism decrease with age, Serbia’s position can in part be explained by its comparatively high proportion of older people.³ A total of 84% of those aged 18–24 but only 47% of those aged 65 years and over expressed optimism. Levels also increase steadily with income, starting at 44% in the lowest income quartile and increasing to 68% in the highest income quartile.

³ Only in Croatia is there a higher proportion of people aged 65 and over, and there, the level of optimism is the lowest among the seven non-EU countries.

The level of optimism recorded for unemployed people (51%) is also significantly below average. As noted in the EQLS overview report, the proportion of people feeling optimistic about the future has a positive correlation with average satisfaction with the economic situation in the country and with trust in government.

Health and mental well-being

Table 3: *Health and mental well-being*

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries				EU27
		Minimum		Maximum		
Satisfaction with health (scale of 1–10)	7.4	Latvia	6.5	Cyprus	8.4	7.3
Mental well-being (scale of 0–100)	54	Serbia	54	Denmark	70	62.5

On average, people in Serbia rate satisfaction with their health at 7.4 on a scale of 1 to 10. This is similar to the EU27 average of 7.3, where satisfaction ranges from 6.5 in Latvia to 8.4 in Cyprus. After Croatia and together with Kosovo, Serbia has the lowest self-reported health satisfaction level of the seven non-EU countries surveyed for the EQLS.

A comparison of health satisfaction levels between the different age categories highlights the importance of age; health satisfaction decreases from 9.3 among those aged 18–24 to 5.0 for those aged 65 and over.

It has become a priority to monitor and address mental well-being, as a substantial body of research shows that unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are detrimental to mental health. Good mental health is also positively associated with life satisfaction (Eurofound, 2012). The World Health Organization’s mental well-being index (WHO-5) score in Serbia is 54, the lowest recorded in all 34 countries surveyed.

Mental health patterns are mostly similar to those recorded in the EU; men (56) score better than women (52), and this gender difference is observed across age groups. However, the finding that Serbia’s older women have the lowest mental well-being points starkly to the pain suffered during the Balkan Wars.⁴

As in the EU27, people’s mental well-being increases with income. However, whereas in the EU27, unemployed people tend to score far below average on the mental well-being index, in Serbia (54) – and the other western Balkan countries – no significant differences are found.

⁴ Similar patterns are found in the other western Balkan countries, but in those countries there are too few women aged 70 and over for statistical inferences to be made.

Living standards

Table 4: *Living standards*

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries				EU27
		Minimum		Maximum		
Satisfaction with standard of living (scale of 1–10)	5.3	Bulgaria	4.7	Denmark	8.3	6.9
Difficulty making ends meet (% 'difficult' or 'very difficult')	31%	Denmark	3%	Greece	50%	17%
Number of items people cannot afford (scale of 0–6)	2.2	Luxembourg	0.3	Bulgaria	2.9	1.2
Informal debts (% in arrears over last 12 months)	9%	Malta	1%	Kosovo	21%	8%

At a rate of 5.3, Serbia has the second lowest level of satisfaction with standard of living of all 34 surveyed countries (second to Bulgaria, at 4.7). The misery index score, an overview measure that adds the unemployment rate to the inflation rate, is among the highest in all 34 surveyed countries, at 30.3. This index score was higher only in Kosovo (52.3) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (35.9) in 2011.

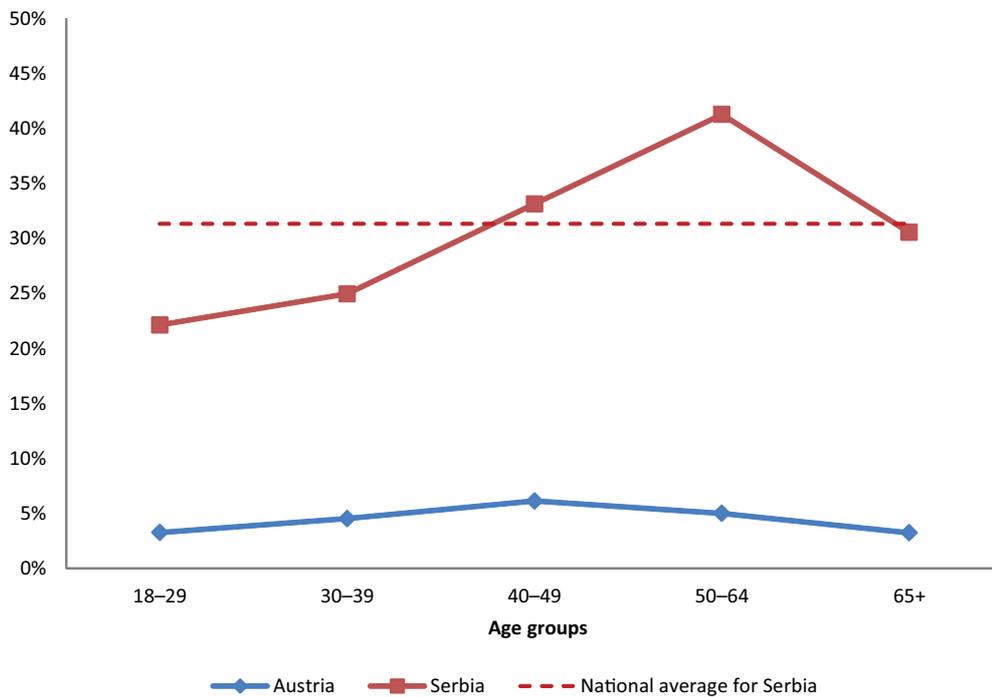
The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality. According to official national statistics, it was 29.5 in 2009 (Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, 2010), placing Serbia in the vicinity of Sweden, Iceland and Cyprus on this index (Eurostat, 2013). Serbia's national statistical office reported that 17% of people were living at risk of poverty in 2009, a similar figure to that found in Italy, Portugal, Latvia and Estonia.⁵

However, around 31% of Serbians have difficulties making ends meet, placing Serbia in the lowest third of countries surveyed according to this indicator. The proportion of people reporting difficulties in making ends meet is higher in Greece (50%, the highest figure of all 34 countries surveyed), followed by Bulgaria (40%), Hungary (37%), Latvia (34%), Slovakia (32%) and Romania (32%).

Those aged 50–64 years are the worst off in terms of making ends meet in Serbia (Figure 2). It is possible that the middle-aged cohort (those aged 40–49 and some of those over 50 years) have been able to withstand the consequences of the Balkan Wars in relation to professional development and well-being. The lowest incidence of difficulty in making ends meet occurs in the youngest cohorts (18–39 years). Nonetheless, it is higher for them than most in the same age group in the rest of Europe.

⁵ Both Gini and at-risk-of-poverty estimates based on the EQLS 2012 are considerably higher.

Figure 2: People finding it difficult or very difficult to make ends meet by age group



With regard to material deprivation, people in Serbia, on average, cannot afford 2.2 out of 6 items considered important for a decent standard of living.⁶ Serbia's neighbouring countries have a similar score on this indicator, but it is higher than in most other European countries. In this regard, Serbia falls between the middle third and the bottom third of countries with the most deprivation.

In Serbia, 9% of people are unable to pay back loans to friends and family; this is higher than the EU27 average of 8%. However, the rate in Serbia is much smaller than it is in Kosovo and Turkey (21% in each), the two countries with the highest proportion of people experiencing difficulties in paying back informal debts.

Work-life balance

Table 5: Work-life balance

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries		EU27
		Minimum	Maximum	
Work-life conflict (on any dimension, % women)	85%	Italy 44%	Cyprus 86%	59%
Work-life conflict (on any dimension, % men)	77%	Italy 39%	Serbia 77%	54%
Doing household tasks at least several days a week, difference between women and men (percentage points)	50	Finland 11	Turkey 72	30
Women, economically inactive, willing to work (%)	57%	Kosovo 45%	Iceland 91%	70%

⁶ These are: keeping the home adequately warm; paying for a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives); having a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day; replacing worn-out furniture; buying new clothes rather than second-hand ones; inviting friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month.

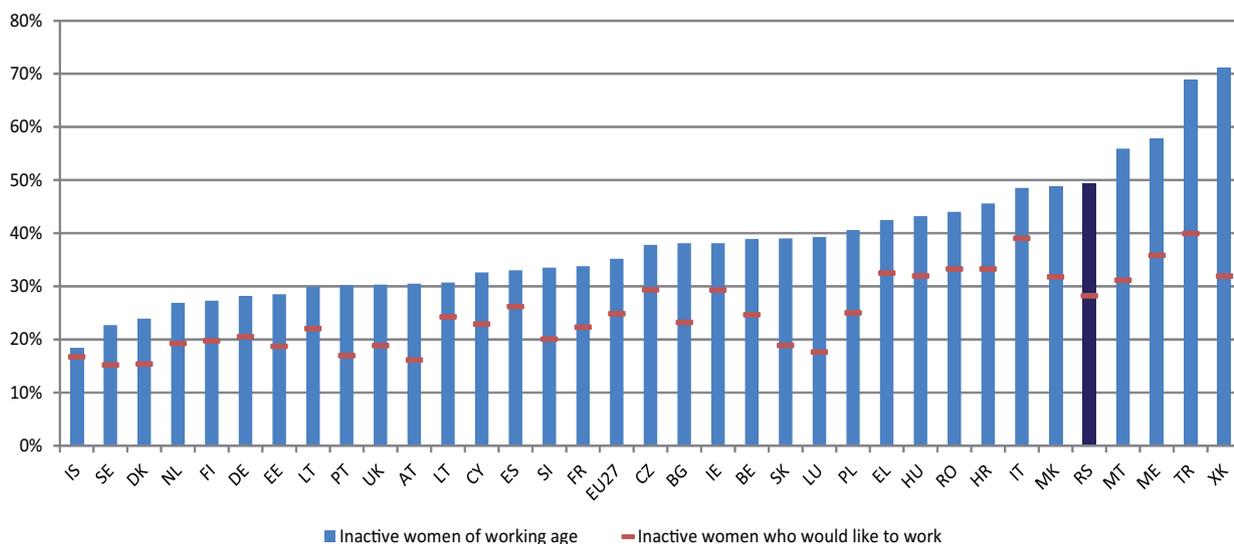
Reconciliation of work with life outside work matters for quality of life as well as for increasing opportunities for more people to work and for achieving gender balance. The EQLS asks employed people if they have problems fulfilling family or household responsibilities because work takes up too much time or because they are too tired after work, and whether concentrating at work is difficult because of family responsibilities.

In Serbia, as well as in other enlargement countries (except Iceland), a relatively high proportion of both men and women experience work–life conflict. In fact, Serbia has the highest proportion of people suffering from work–life conflict (80%) of all the countries surveyed. This may relate to work organisation and inflexible working time arrangements. These issues could be addressed by the social partners and government policy that aims to help workers achieve a better work–life balance.

Life outside of work is, to a certain extent, shaped by the amount of daily household tasks and their distribution among family members. Household tasks can represent a significant extra burden on women if they are the main contributors to housework, especially if they also have a job. The difference between the contribution of women and of men to household tasks in Serbia (50 percentage points) is above the EU average. It is higher than in Croatia (43 percentage points) but is similar to other countries in the western Balkan region.

Serbia, like other enlargement countries (except Iceland), has a relatively large proportion of working age women, 49%, who are not in the labour force (Figure 3). However, more than half of them (57%) would like to have paid work if they could freely choose their working hours. These two figures suggest that there is potential for the country to increase its labour market participation rate by developing balanced work arrangements. This could also serve to achieve greater gender balance in terms of work and family responsibilities.

Figure 3: *Proportion of inactive working age women in the labour market and the proportion of these who would like to work*



Source: *European Labour Force Survey (Eurostat) and EQLS*

Public services

Table 6: *Public services*

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries		EU27
		Minimum	Maximum	
Cost as a problem to see a doctor (% very difficult)	14%	UK 1%	Greece 28%	8%
Households with children <12 yrs using childcare services	23%	Turkey 7%	Sweden 69%	34%
Proportion using public transport	85%	Cyprus 50%	Turkey 97%	87%

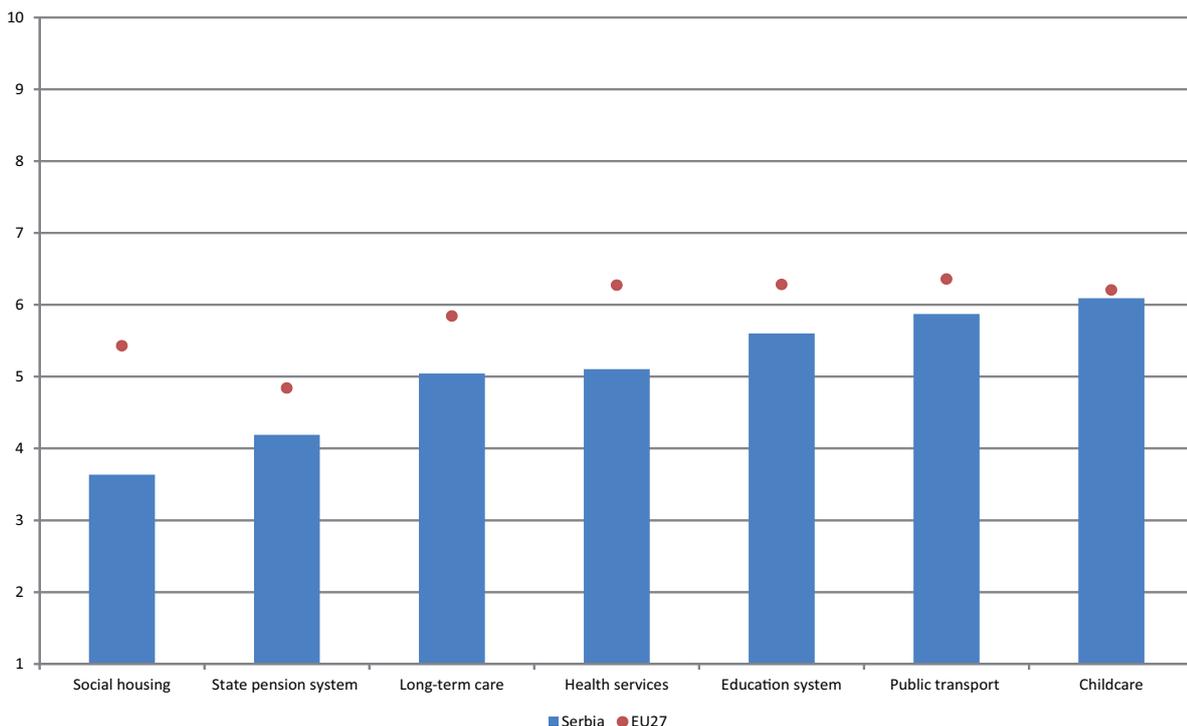
Of the public services asked about in the EQLS, people in Serbia give highest quality rating to childcare (6.1); this is similar to the EU27 average (Figure 4). The proportion of people with children who use childcare services (23%) is similar to other countries of the western Balkan region, but is lower than the EU27 average (34%).

The quality of health services is rated at 5.1, while it is 6.3 in the EU27. The quality of long-term care is rated at a similar level (5.0).

People in Serbia experience a high level of difficulty accessing health services. The cost of seeing a doctor causes great difficulty for 14% of people; this figure is somewhat higher than the EU27 average. In addition to this, 30% find delays in getting an appointment very difficult, and 24% find the waiting time on the day of their appointment very difficult. These figures are among the highest of all surveyed countries (they are higher only in Greece, at 33% and 27% respectively).

The lowest rankings in Serbia are given to social services based on social transfers, such as social housing and state pensions (4.2). People of pre-pension age (50–64 years) are most critical (3.9); this is similar to Croatia. It is the same age group that has the highest rate in difficulties making ends meet (see Figure 2).

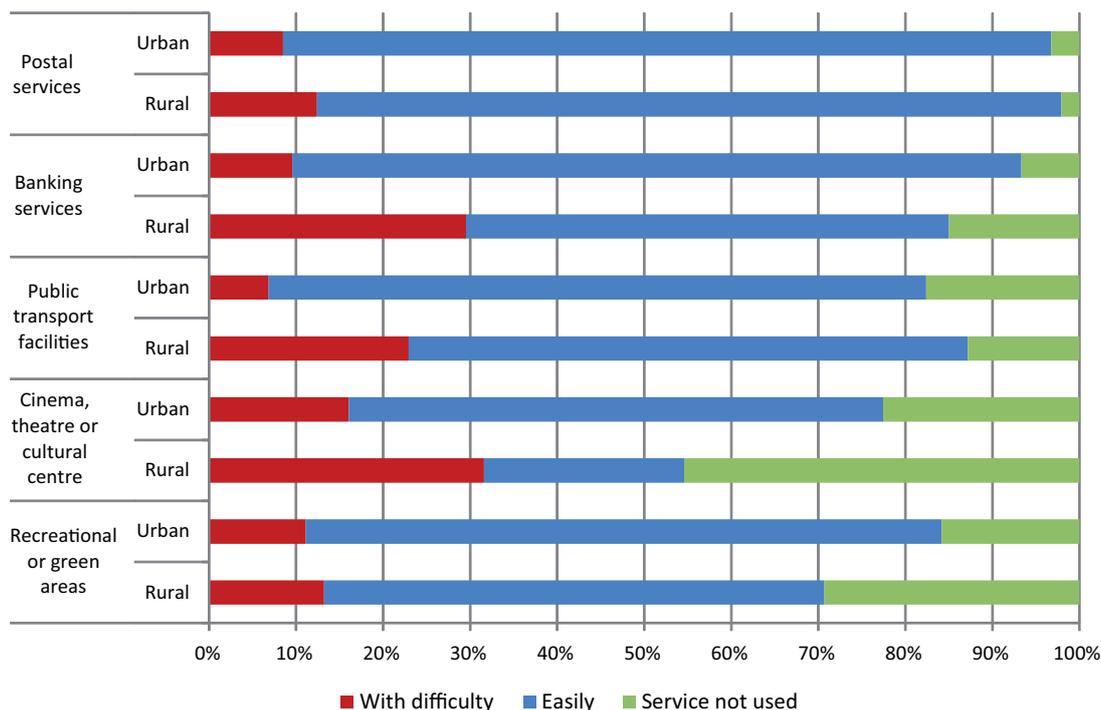
Figure 4: *Ratings of quality of public services*



Note: Scale of 1–10.

The rural population is considerably more disadvantaged than the urban population in relation to access to banking services, the cinema or cultural centres, and public transport (Figure 5). In total, 45% of rural residents say they do not use cultural services at all. Serbia has an unusual situation in that there are more non-users of public transport in urban areas than there are in rural areas, regardless of the fact that considerably more rural residents have problems in accessing public transport facilities. These differences suggest that considerably higher levels of widespread poverty may exist in rural areas, with people not being able to afford their own vehicle or cultural entertainment.

Figure 5: Access to neighbourhood services, % of respondents



Trust and tensions

Table 7: Trust and tensions

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries				EU27
		Minimum		Maximum		
Trust in people (scale of 1–10)	4.6	Cyprus	1.9	Finland	7.1	5.1
Trust in the government (scale of 1–10)	3.0	Greece	2.1	Luxembourg	6.5	4.0
Trust in local authorities (scale of 1–10)	3.3	Serbia	3.3	Luxembourg	6.7	5.2
Tension between different racial or ethnic groups (% perceiving 'a lot of tension')	33%	Iceland	11%	Czech Republic	68%	37%
Tension between poor people and rich people (% perceiving 'a lot of tension')	48%	Denmark	4%	Hungary	71%	35%

This section looks at trust in people, trust in public institutions and the perceived tensions between various groups in society.

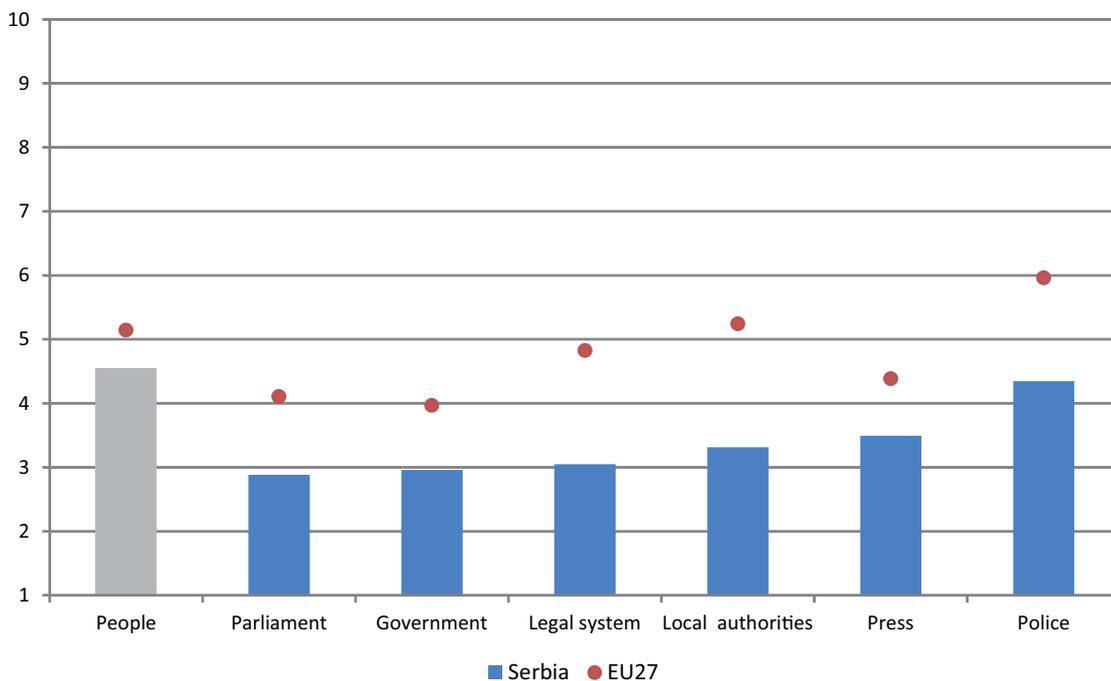
Trust in other people is seen as a key indicator of social capital. Overall in Serbia, the level of general trust in people is 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 10 (Figure 6). Comparing this with the findings for the EU27 (5.1 on average) shows that 17 EU Member States have higher trust levels than Serbia, whose score is similar to that in Bulgaria (4.5) and Lithuania and Malta (both 4.7).

Analysis of sociodemographic factors shows that, unlike what is typically found in other countries, education and young age are not closely interrelated with higher trust. What appears to matter more in Serbia is extreme hardship, which has a depleting effect on trust; the scores for respondents who stated they had great difficulty in making ends meet and had the highest level of material deprivation are significantly below average (3.4 and 3.7, respectively).

With regard to public institutions, trust in the government in Serbia (3.0) is well below the EU27 average (4.0), and is lowest of the seven surveyed enlargement countries. Trust in the national parliament (2.9) and in local authorities (3.3) is also low. Other research has found that levels of trust in public institutions correlate strongly with perceived public sector corruption.⁷

Relatively low trust in local authorities distinguishes enlargement countries (except Iceland) from nearly all EU countries, where people have a greater level of trust in local authorities than they do in national institutions. These findings may have implications for regional and infrastructure development in the future and may send a signal for strengthening institutional capacities.

Figure 6: *Trust in people and in institutions*



Note: Scale of 1–10.

⁷ In the EU27, the correlation coefficient is 0.86 (see Eurofound, 2012, p. 137). Serbia has a score of 3.9 on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, whereby 0 = highly corrupt and 10 = highly clean (see <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>).

In countries with a low level of trust in governmental institutions, the press may be seen as a counterbalance to a lack of transparency and for this reason may be trusted more.

With regard to social cohesion, one-third of those surveyed in Serbia believe there is a lot of tension between different racial and ethnic groups in their country.

Close to one-half of those surveyed believe there is a lot of tension between poor people and rich people (48%), which further suggests problems regarding social cohesion in Serbia. Furthermore, large differences exist depending on the extent to which people experience material deprivation, with 68% of the most vulnerable group indicating that there is a lot of tension between rich and poor people.

Participation and exclusion

Table 8: *Participation and exclusion*

	Serbia	Range of 34 surveyed countries				EU27
		Minimum		Maximum		
Index of perceived social exclusion (scale of 1–5)	2.5	Denmark	1.6	Cyprus	3.0	2.2
Participation in voluntary work	16%	Montenegro	9%	Kosovo	61%	32%
Civic and political involvement	19%	Turkey	8%	Iceland	61%	25%

The perceived social exclusion index is based on questions about feeling left out of society, experiencing complications in life and recognition of one’s activities. Serbia scores 2.5 on this index (on a scale of 1 to 5). Serbia and Kosovo, having the same index score, have the highest levels of perceived exclusion among enlargement countries; in the EU27, higher levels are found in three countries – Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece.

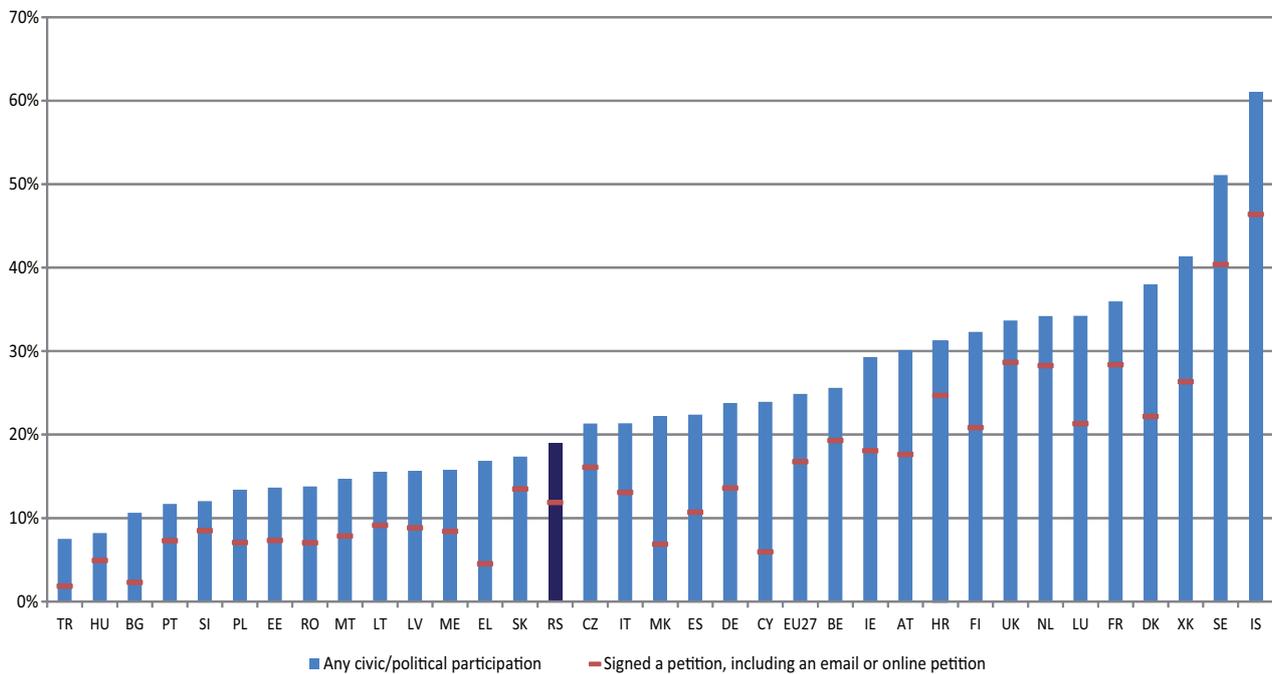
The sense of exclusion is considerably stronger among older people (2.7 for those aged over 50 years), but the largest differences relate to income levels: the index score is 2.1 for those in the highest income quartile and 2.9 for those in the lowest one.

The proportion of people who contacted a politician or an official or attended a meeting or a demonstration (12%) is below the EU27 average (16%). A total of 12% signed petitions, including electronic ones. The overall rate of civic or political participation is 19% (Figure 7).

The rate of civic or political involvement through the aforementioned direct contact methods (and excluding petitions) is below average among people aged 35–49 years, and above average for those with a higher education and those in the second highest income quartile. There is also a gender difference: the rate is 15% for men and 9% for women.

Involvement in unpaid voluntary work at least once a year is reported by 16%, but the rate of regular volunteers (who contribute every month), is considerably smaller. It should be noted, however, that for volunteering to happen, framework conditions and infrastructure can play an important role.

Figure 7: Civic and political involvement, % of respondents



The approach in the EQLS reflects an increasingly global movement that goes beyond an exclusive focus on economic progress towards measuring broader public policy goals, embracing a greater consideration of quality of life.

For more aspects of quality of life and a more extensive set of the EQLS results, please access the [Survey Mapping Tool](#) on the Eurofound website.

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