

Interreg - IPA CBC

Croatia - Serbia



VISITUS

ACTION PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF TOURISM OFFER FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS

**STUDY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN WEST BACKA DISTRICT
AND OSIJEK-BARANJA COUNTY WITH RECOMMENDATION FOR
FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

**ACTION PLAN IS PART OF INTERREG IPA CBC CROATIA
SERBIA PROJECT:
"ENRICHING TOURISM OFFER FOR PERSONS WITH VISUAL
IMPAIRMENT AND BLINDNESS - VISITUS"**

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INTRODUCTION

The project entitled "Enriching tourism offer for persons with visual impairment and blindness – acronym VISITUS" is funded by the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020. The partners on the project are the City of Sombor, Republic of Serbia; the Municipality of Erdut, Republic of Croatia; and the Institute of Economic Sciences, Republic of Serbia.

The main objective of the project is to create conditions for improvement of joint tourism offer in targeted cross-border area (West Backa District in Serbia and Osijek-Baranja County in Croatia) by expanding it to the persons with visual impairment and blindness. Achieving proclaimed project objective could be observed from two different aspects.

Firstly, development of tourism for blind and visually impaired as a form of accessible tourism could be important in terms of local economic development. As per Report on Economic impact and travel patterns of accessible tourism in Europe, extensive improvements of accessibility in tourism can improve the overall economic contributions by up to 36.5% and 39.4% (EU27 travellers), and up to 74.7% and 74.9% (international travellers) generating significant economic contributions with respect to output and employment (European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, 2014). Given the current situation in the field of accessibility in tourism in Serbia and Croatia, also confirmed by the research realized within the VISITUS project, there are significant potential benefits for local development which may arise from improvements in accessibility.

Secondly, development of tourism for blind and visually impaired is of great importance with regard to the respect of human rights and creation of the society of equal opportunities. Blind and visually impaired persons are facing mobility and orientation challenges in their everyday life. Their visual capacity is reduced indicating numerous potential problems when leaving home, walking and communicating with the outside world as well as resolving some ordinary daily issues without direct assistance. The ultimate aim of the socially responsible state should be to create environment that will be sensitive to the needs of blind and visually impaired and supportive to the targeted group in terms of creating the highest possible level of independence in their regular life.

Increasing number of tourists in the field would have favourable impact on both of the aforementioned aspects. It would bring benefits to the local economy and result in greater and more independent mobility of blind and visually impaired.

Osijek-Baranja County in Croatia and West Backa District in Serbia have rich tourism potentials which are insufficiently recognized and under-utilised. More precisely, tourism offer is not accommodated for persons with visual impairment and blindness, resulting in exclusion of this disability group from the rich tourism offer of this area which is characterised by natural and cultural heritage, population of multi-ethnic structure and large number of traditional cultural events. The VISITUS project is based on the principle of inclusion, enabling blind and visually impaired persons to fully participate in newly designed tourism offer and the principle of applying modern solutions and advanced IC technologies which will enable these persons to use the new tourism offer in its full capacity.

The main objective of the Action plan is to develop specific methodology, identify policy applicable research findings and provide recommendations for developing tourism offer to persons with visual impairment and blindness in the targeted cross-border area. The Action Plan is intended to represent a solid evidence based input for sustainable policy in the field of accessible tourism with a particular focus on blind and visually impaired persons. For that purpose, developed Action Plan and mapping specific tourist offer is designed in order to be applied in creating future action plans and policy papers, as well as for mapping tourist offers for other vulnerable groups.

Besides the detailed explanation of the research background, developed methodology (desk and field research – interviews and surveys) and sample, the Action plan includes institutional and regulatory framework analysis, summary of the research results, SWOT analysis and policy recommendations.

The first part of the Action plan describes the research methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews with persons with visual impairment and blindness and content analysis of the secondary data survey of friends and/or family members who follow i.e. provide assistance to persons with visual impairment and blindness during their tourist travelling.

The second part of the Action plan is focused on the overall situation in the field of tourism for blind and visually impaired. This part also includes analysis of the legislation and main strategic documents as well as role of key stakeholders in the field, as well as analysis of main barriers and systemic obstacles for greater improvement of tourism for blind and visually impaired.

Considering research performed within the project, the third part of the document analyses research findings obtained during the process of interviewing the main stakeholders and processing data obtained from the surveys in both Croatia and Serbia.

The following chapter provides SWOT analysis as a systematic list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the development of tourism, i.e. tourist potentials in the cross border area.

Finally, the last part of the Action plan provides a set of specific policy recommendations stemming from results of both desk and field research. Recommendations have been amended by suggested inputs for development of joint touristic route in cross border area and a list of indicators which could be used as a policy tool for measuring the progress in the field.

The research objective is to obtain a detailed picture of previous experiences and preferences of people with visual impairments and blindness and their companions as users of the touristic services. The Institute of Economic Sciences conducted the entire research for Serbia. For the purposes of obtaining a better quality and a more in-depth analysis, the Institute of Economic Sciences has commissioned the Henda d.o.o. market research agency from Zagreb to conduct the research of tourism needs of people with visual impairment and blindness in Croatia which comprises of interviews and a survey. The research results are used to customise the touristic offer for that specific group in the regions of Osijek-Baranja County in Croatia and West-Backa District in Serbia. Furthermore, the Institute of Economic Sciences has commissioned The Institute of Economics, Zagreb to provide desk research of relevant documents concerning the rights of blind and visually impaired persons, especially in the context of tourism further supplemented by analysis of tourism for vulnerable groups in general.

Also, in order to get valuable inputs for the survey and enhance the quality of recommendations provided in the Action plan, three study visits were conducted. The first study visit was made to the Hostel ERKS in Premantura, Croatia. The second study visit was made to the Health Resort Junakovic in Apatin, Serbia, while the third visit was made to the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (UICI) in Roma, Italy. We would hereby like to thank Mrs Mihaela Zlateska, Manager of the Hostel ERKS in Premantura, Mrs Dragana Mrdjenov, Director of the Health Resort Junakovic, as well as Mrs Francesca Sbianchi, International Relations Office Coordinator and Mr Ettore Galassi, member of Sport, Tourism and Leisure Time Committee in the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted for sharing their experiences, useful advice and for guiding us in drafting this Action plan.

1. METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfil the project objectives, the research was conducted by using the following methods:

- (1) Desk research of relevant documents supplemented by books, reports, laws, by-laws, regulations, reliefs and all other relevant official documents concerning the rights of blind and visually impaired persons, especially in the context of tourism further supplemented by analysis of tourism for vulnerable groups in general;
- (2) In-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with officials and members of associations of blind and visually impaired persons in twenty towns - ten in Croatia and ten in Serbia.

The semi-structured interview guide was used as a research instrument. All interviews in Serbia were conducted by project team members from the Institute of Economic Sciences and all interviews in Croatia were conducted by Hendl's highly trained interviewers. All interviewers were specially prepared for the topic of research and the characteristics of respondents. The average interview length was forty minutes. The research was conducted in compliance with norm ISO 20252:2012 and ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research.

Serbian sample - 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were blind or visually impaired persons who are members of local blind and visually impaired association. Also, an interview was conducted with the president of the National Federation of the Blind situated in Belgrade.

Participants were recruited through contact with local associations. The sample consisted of:

- 13 female and 17 male participants
- President of the Federation – male participant
- 3 members from each of the following associations of blind and visually impaired people:
 - Association of blind people Subotica
 - Association of blind people Novi Sad
 - Association of blind people Zaječar
 - Association of blind people Zrenjanin
 - Association of blind people Paraćin
 - Association of blind people Kruševac
 - Association of blind people Kragujevac

- Association of blind people Niš
- Association of blind people Leskovac
- Association of blind people Novi Pazar

Croatian sample - 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were blind or visually impaired people who are members of local blind and visually impaired association. Participants were recruited through contact with local associations. The sample consisted of:

- 21 male and 9 female participants
- 3 members from each of the following associations of blind and visually impaired people:
 - Association of blind people Karlovac
 - Association of blind people Kutina
 - Association of blind people Našice
 - Association of blind people Nova Gradiška
 - Association of blind people Osijek
 - Association of blind people Primorsko Goranska District
 - Association of blind people Slavonski Brod
 - Association of blind people Split
 - Association of blind people Varaždin
 - Association of blind people Zagreb

(3) Survey of family members, friends and professionals in the role of accompanying persons on touristic travelling occasions in the same twenty towns.

This part of the research is conducted using the questionnaire created by the Institute of Economic Sciences from Belgrade. The average interview length was five minutes and was conducted via personal interviews using TAPI (Tablet assisted personal interviewing) and PAPI (Paper-and-Pencil Interviewing) approach.

The sample included 400 respondents - travelling companions of blind and visually impaired persons. The survey was conducted in the following ten towns in Serbia: Subotica, Novi Sad, Zaječar, Zrenjanin, Paraćin, Kruševac, Kragujevac, Niš, Leskovac and Novi Pazar. Furthermore, the survey was conducted in the following ten towns in Croatia: Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, Osijek, Našice, Slavonski Brod, Varaždin, Kutina, Karlovac and Nova Gradiška. No further screening was included.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD – SYSTEMIC INCENTIVES AND CHALLENGES FOR TOURISM OF BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN SERBIA AND CROATIA

One of the first obstacles in performing research on developing tourism offer for blind and visually impaired persons in Serbia and Croatia is lack of available and reliable data. Unfortunately, statistic databases do not have precise data on the number and structure of blind and visually impaired persons, neither the data on the number of tourists/overnights/visits performed by this group of people. Some rough estimates of the National Association of blind people stated that around 6,000 blind and 15,000 persons with visual impairments currently live in Croatia (around 0.5% of the total population). They are fulfilling their rights by participating in one of 27 local associations of blind and visually impaired. In Serbia, National Association of blind people recorded around 12,000 of blind and people with severe visual impairment. There are 47 local associations.

At the global level there are two institutions/associations with an ultimate aim to protect and promote interests of blind and partially sighted. Croatian and Serbian associations of blind and visually impaired are full members of both global institutions.

World Blind Union (WBU) gathers 285 million of blind and partially sighted people in 190 countries. With regard to its mission, WBU is dedicated on creating the world in which all blind and partially sighted people can fully participate in all life aspects. Its activities and goals WBU is achieving through coalition of three international organisations - Vision Alliance, IAPB (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness) and the ICEVI (International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment), which all in different aspects contribute to the quality of life of the blind and partially sighted.

Another important institution is European Blind Union (EBU) founded in 1984 which represents association of 42 European associations of blind. It is one of the 6 regional bodies of the WBU and the only one in charge for the issues of the target group in Europe. It is a non-government and non-profit institution led by the 13 members Executive Board and General Assembly. Its mission and objectives EBU is realizing through the following activities, particularly important for the local member associations and stated within Article 2, Section 2 – Powers of its Constitution document:

- To foster and assist organizations working in the field of blind and partially sighted welfare throughout Europe.
- To promote improvements in the living standards and quality of life of blind and partially sighted people throughout Europe, particularly in the fields of education,

health, welfare, social security, rehabilitation, vocational training, employment, sports and recreation, culture, access to information, technology, mobility and transport and in any other field deemed expedient.

- In collaboration with national members, to lobby national governments and other national and international organizations in support of policies and programmes benefiting blind and partially sighted people, and to advise and assist them in their implementation.
- To provide for and encourage the exchange of information and experience between organizations of and for blind and partially sighted people and other bodies in Europe.
- To encourage and carry out research in all fields of blindness and partial sight.
- To collect and disseminate information on the conditions of blind and partially sighted people in Europe, and to promote enlightened attitudes towards them.
- To provide necessary technical and material assistance to national members in furthering the objects of EBU.
- To raise money to enable it to carry out its objects.
- To hold land, maintain offices, employ staff and enter into contracts with third parties to enable it to pursue its objects.
- To take any other action necessary to achieve the objects of EBU.

Other important institutions at the global level include the following:

- The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) – global association of individuals and organisations dedicated to enabling good quality education for children and youth with visual impairment.
- The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) – institution aimed at coordinating and promoting activities on blind prevention. Its activities resulted in establishment of WHO global initiative VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.
- The International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) – international organisation that provides support in providing and training guide dogs that will serve blind and visually impaired.
- World Access for the Blind – non-profit organization aimed at development, interaction, life satisfaction and quality of interaction between blind people.
- Daisy Consortium – worldwide library that provides Braille and audio books

- International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) – organises and facilitates various sports activities and events for blind.
- International Braille Chess Association (IBCA) – body in charge for global promotion of chess for blind and visually impaired gathering members from more than 60 countries.

Considering the aforementioned activities, Action Plan prepared within the VISITUS project will be particularly focused on the activities 1, 2, 3 and 5, as they are directly tackling the issues of the project and are directly related to the tourism as an important aspect of the quality of life of blind and partially sighted.

National Association of blind people in Serbia in Serbia is key institution at the national level with an aim to protect and promote interests of blind citizens in Serbia. It is non-Government and non-profit public institution aimed at fulfilling particular goals defined by the Statute of the Association. The main goals of the Associations are as follows:

- Eliminating or alleviating the severe consequences of blindness and impairment;
- Active life without discrimination of the blind and achievement of broad-based goals and program tasks.

Activities of the Association cover two aspects of life of blind and visually impaired:

- Social and humanitarian activities (i.e. procurement and distribution of specific tools for blind);
- Library, publishing and information activities.

Apart from National Association and 47 local associations, in Serbia are active other institutions whose work scope is also covering issues of blind and visually impaired.

National organization of persons with disabilities is a network of national associations of persons with disabilities established in 2007. Its mission is to increase participation of people with disabilities in society, ensure protection of human rights in the field and reduce discrimination, as well as to work on involvement of people with disabilities in formulating and adopting legislation based on international documents and standards.

Association of users of assistive technologies – institution established in 2013 with the aim to improve quality of life of blind and visually impaired through use of modern information and communication technologies.

Homer – non-profit organisation established in 1994 in order to provide support for blind and visually impaired in resolving their crucial problems such as employment,

rehabilitation, medical treatment and others as well as performing every day activities.

Association "White Stick" – a non-profit association aimed at improving quality of life of blind and visually impaired persons in Serbia.

Serbian National Sports Association of Blind – established as a result of numerous initiatives of sports clubs of blind and visually impaired in order to facilitate realisation of sports activities and events.

Key operational institution providing information, research, institutional and legal basis for defending and promoting interests of blind and visually impaired in Croatia is Croatian National Association of blind people. In addition to its basic activity, the Association portal contains information on performed projects, calls and programmes related to blind and visually impaired, online libraries and databases, donors, education, and other useful links and contacts.

In Croatia, in addition to the 27 associations of blind and visually impaired, there are also other important Government and non-government institutions and online platforms in charge of tackling the issues of blind.

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities. As an independent state institution, the Office has role in protection, monitoring and promotion of the rights and interests of persons with disabilities on the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, international treaties and laws. In order to fulfil its mission, the Office is defending the interest of blind and visually impaired by respecting the following documents:

- o Law on the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities
- o National Strategy for Equalizing Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities
- o Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- o Law on Prevention of Discrimination

Institute for Expertise, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. It has been established for the purpose of expertise in the field of physical, intellectual, sensitive, mental, working and other abilities of persons including the field of professional rehabilitation and employment.

Local associations engaged in different fields such as mobility, training support dogs, arts, sports, etc. This group includes associations and non-government organisations that are operating with a mission of realizing specific interests of blind and visually impaired. As the official legislative is primarily oriented towards protection of basic

rights and interests, these organisations are contributing in other fields providing better quality of life and inclusion.

Online portals are important source of information for blind and visually impaired. They are developed in order to satisfy specific information needs of blind equipped with necessary technical modifications.

At the EU level, problems of blind and visually impaired are incorporated into the Inclusive Growth pillar of the EU 2020 Strategy. Strategy itself envisage activities aimed to define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk such as blind and visually impaired. Additionally, Guide on EU Funding for the Tourism Sector 2014-2020 created by the EU Commission is directly supporting and stimulating capacity building schemes for accessible tourism. In this context, it could be concluded that the rights and mobility of the blind and visually impaired are recognized by the key strategic documents of the EU and Croatia as an EU member itself.

Specific rights and policy actions could be, even more efficiently, created and applied at the country level.

In Serbia, there are several documents – laws, bylaws, rulebooks, etc. regulating rights for blind and visually impaired.

Law on Prevention of Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 33/2006 and 13/2016) envisages general rules for protection of people with disabilities including blind and visually impaired on the basis of their disabilities. Law also defines specific cases of discrimination and measures for protection and promotion of social inclusion. Article 18 of the Labour law ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2005, 61/2005, 54/2009, 32/2013, 75/2014, 13/2017 - decision US and 113/2017) also prevents direct and indirect discrimination of blind and visually impaired. Similarly, Law on Social Protection of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 24/2011) in the Article 45 defines support for independent living. Indirectly, by respecting this rule, Government guarantees equal treatment of all disabled groups. In general, respecting measures for independent life is in charge of local municipalities. The Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 36/2009 and 32/2013) – regulates incentives for employment and equal treatment of persons with disabilities to the labour market. As per findings of the project and performed research, employment is one of the greatest issues for blind and visually impaired. For that reason, law affirms equal opportunities, professional rehabilitation and exercise of measures of active employment labour policy. Law on Movement with the Help of Dog Guides ("Official

Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 29/2015) defines rights for free access and transport of blind and visually impaired including access to public buildings, working and others space.

For tourism, the most important regulation relates to laws and rulebooks on accessibility. In order to exercise rights and benefits defined by relevant legislative documents, blind and visually impaired have to be registered in local associations of blind. The most important benefits are as follows:

- Free local transport (specific provisions regulated at the city and local municipality level)
- 6 return tickets for in-country transport for which blind and visually impaired pays 25% of the regular price, while assisting person is free of charge - The Law on Privileges in Internal Passenger Traffic (Official Gazette of RS, No. 22/93).
- People with disabilities (level of disability of 80% and more) are free of charge in terms of paying tolls in highways – The Law on Public Roads ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 101/2005, 123/2007, 101/2011, 93/2012 and 104/2013).
- Rulebook on Technical Accessibility Standards ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 46/2013) 95 - defines technical standards aimed at supporting independent movement of people with specific disabilities including blind and visually impaired (i.e. sound signalisation, tactile fields and lines, etc.).
- Benefits at local level significantly vary with regard to different municipality. Regulative is inconsistent covering some of the basic needs of blind and visually impaired such as support for independent living, subsidies for covering communal expenses, scholarships for youth and others.

Main legislative documents in Croatia in the field are the National Strategy for Equalizing Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities , Law on the Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities (adopted in 2015) and Rulebook on ensuring accessibility of buildings to persons with disabilities and reduced mobility (adopted in 2004). They provide sufficient framework for the realization of the rights of blind and visually impaired in Croatia including specific obligations for different stakeholders related to reduction of communication and mobility barriers.

National Strategy for Equalizing Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2017. It envisaged assistance service for blind people, and provided financial resources for projects that provide assistants for blind persons in order to support their more independent movement. Additionally, Strategy defined education courses and materials printed in Braille, information support and support for libraries

for blind. Blind and visually impaired are also stimulated to take participation in tourism and cultural events. In that context, the Theatre for blind and visually impaired and the Croatian library for blind are operating in Croatia. Under the Measure 4, the involvement of the provisions of the Marrakesh Treaty into the national legislation has been envisaged in order to facilitate access to published works for the blind and poor, and for persons who for some other reason cannot use printed editions.

The Law on the Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities regulates the ways on data collection, reasons, types, level and weight of health damage, as well as data on rights and ways of data processing, usage and protection. Since the electronic survey is covering only technical information classified in 21 searchable parameters, register and its databases do not cover information on the life standards of particular group of persons with disabilities. The analysis conducted for the purposes of the VISITUS project provides arguments in favour of more detailed survey by including questions concerning employment, living standard, health treatment, realization of the rights defined by laws and other legislative.

Among others, the Rulebook on ensuring accessibility of buildings to persons with disabilities and reduced mobility envisaged the following commitments with regard to the specific needs of blind and visually impaired:

Article 4

- Sound announcement is a warning and informing the blind and visually impaired person through sound;
- Acoustic signaling is signaling that helps the blind and visually impaired people to navigate in space;
- The tactile guiding line is the tactile treatment of the walking surface intended for directing the movement of blind and visually impaired persons, which at the end of the path of guidance and at the place of changes in direction of guidance is marked by a change in the structure of the relief treatment;
- The tactile warning line is the tactile treatment of the walking surface, which is set for the purpose of alerting the blind and visually impaired to the danger of traffic;
- The tactile field of warning is a tactile treatment of a walking surface that serves to alert and inform blind and visually impaired people about changing the level of movement;

- The tactile plan of the crossing is a relief marking that provides information on the length and type of pedestrian crossing to the blind and visually impaired persons.

Articles 28, 31, 32

- Telephone, text phone, fax, ATM, desk and counter must enable the specific conditions to be met in order to satisfy needs of blind and visually impaired.

Articles 39, 40 and 43

- All utility equipment (benches, tables, signs, lighting columns, baskets, bicycle holders, billboards, etc.) are placed along the edge of the public pedestrian area so that it does not present an obstacle for the blind and partially sighted.
- All utility equipment (benches, tables, signs, lighting columns, baskets, bicycle holders, billboards, etc.) are placed along the edge of the public pedestrian area so that it does not present an obstacle for the blind and partially sighted.
- A traffic light located in the area where the building is located in which the blind and visually impaired are frequent persons, has an acoustic signalization
- Dotted sound dispersion of sound signalisation set at a traffic light, directed to call a blind or visually impaired person crossing the road.
- At the intersection located in the area of the settlement where the building where the visually impaired and visually impaired are located, the pedestrian crossing must have an accessible traffic signal with sound signalization and tactile lines with a minimum width of 40 cm.

Although the aforementioned measures indicate general attitude towards accessibility for blind and visually impaired there are certain issues that should be resolved, particularly in the field of mobility and touristic needs. Namely, in the Section IV of the Rulebook, it is not envisaged an obligation for compulsory usage of particular elements of access for blind and visually impaired. Buildings for commercial, catering and / or tourist purposes are free in opting whether to apply suggested elements of access. Specific elements related to blind and visually impaired are not mandatory in most of the cases. Additionally, potential sanctions for not respecting the rulebook measures are not clear. For that reason, more restrictive, and in particular cases mandatory, legislative environment should be created to ensure application of the measures with the positive effects on the rights of vulnerable groups.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Interviews with members of Associations

The report is based on data gathered through qualitative, in-depth interviews. The data and conclusions cannot be generalized to the entire population of blind and visually impaired persons due to the size of the sample.

As noted before, participants were recruited from different associations all over Serbia and Croatia. Many of them state that they do not know the exact number of members of their association but rather estimate that number.

According to the data collected, there are 40 associations and 12.000 members linked together through the National Federation of the Blind in Serbia. Some associations are municipal, while others are inter-municipal organizations. Also, there are other associations with various purposes i.e. sports association, "The White Cane Association", etc.

Based on Croatian responses, it seems that Zagreb Association of Blind People is the largest one, with 1190 members, while Nasice Association is the smallest one, with around 40 members.

Majority of participants also stated that their association is the only association of blind people in their local community (city or county). But, some of them mention that there are some other associations who have different purposes, such as sports associations, students' organizations, associations for training guide dogs etc.

"There are some other organizations, but if an organization doesn't know its members by names it cannot accomplish the mission of helping blind people achieve their aspirations and goals."

Female, member of Novi Sad Association

"There are some other organizations: there is a library for the blind people and there are a few organizations which deal with improvement of education."

Female, member of Zagreb Association

Collaboration with local authorities

All participants stated that their association collaborates with local authorities, even though not all of them know in which ways and to what extent. Most often mentioned forms of collaboration are:

- **Funding** – Funded projects differ among associations but the approved funding is rather limited in almost all organizations. Funded projects include but are not limited to the everyday functioning of association, financial aid for impoverished members, social activities, sports activities, trips, etc. The majority of participants in Serbia stated that they are not satisfied with the current collaboration. They complain primarily about the amount of funds and the delay in payments, but also about the way their associations are treated. In Croatia, members tend to be more satisfied with the current collaboration, but not fully.

„Yes, our collaboration is satisfying. It is based on financial aid – renting stands, one-time financial aids, firewood for winter etc. We don't ask for much.”

Male, member of Našice Association

“We are treated as an association of people with a hobby, as if we were blind out of hobby.”

Male, member of Novi Pazar Association

- **Employment** – A number of participants in Croatia mentioned that there are blind or visually impaired people employed in their local authority administration, which was not the case in Serbia.
- **Traffic regulation** – Participants from bigger cities often say that an important part of their contact with local authorities is making traffic more friendly and accessible to blind people. That includes installing audible traffic lights, removing architectural barriers, facilitating entrance to public transport etc.

„Of course we collaborate with local authorities. That collaboration is mostly aimed towards improving the accessibility of public areas, especially towards adjusting the crossings and public transport.”

Male, member of Zagreb Association

- **Raising awareness** – Some participants stated that they, together with local authorities, work hard on raising awareness about life and needs of blind and visually impaired people. Together they present in schools, kindergartens and on different manifestations.

„We do different presentations; work with schools, companies, city and its institutions. We collaborate on presenting the blind and their life. We are very involved – lectures in Ministry of Internal Affairs, to university students etc.“

Male, member of Primorsko Goranska County association

There are also participants who stated that they are satisfied with the existing collaboration and stressed out that not everything can be expected from the government authorities, but blind and visually impaired people need to make more efforts themselves to improve their position.

"We cannot expect everything from the government and from other people. We should not hide behind our handicap. When somebody wants something very badly, he will find a way to get it."

Female, member of Kruševac Association

Organizing and funding trips

According to the most common interview answers, associations do organize trips but not very often, mostly depending on their financial capabilities. On average, organized field trips occur once or twice a year, and are almost never abroad.

„We do not go abroad, but we take a day trip once or twice a year. We usually go to Slavonia and Baranja, and this year we plan to go to Zagreb for Advent.“

Male, member of Osijek Association

"There used to be more organized trips, but now days our association lacks the money."

Male, member of Zrenjanin Association

Croatian members say that things are different for members of sports clubs, such chess, dart or bowling team – they attend tournaments in Europe several times a year and stay for a few days. When the trips are organized, the response is usually very good – one bus usually fills up with association members and their companions. Trips are seen as a good opportunity for socializing and learning and the majority of participants state that they would prefer they happen more often. Trips are most often funded by local authorities or donations from various companies. Some associations apply for EU project funds or earn money themselves by selling some products.

„Trips are partly financed by the city, partly by the agency and we often get a free bus from the bus company.”

Male, member of Zagreb association

Almost all participants in Serbia stated that they love to travel and wish there were more organized trips throughout the year. Some members stated that they often travel in their own arrangement i.e. with personal companion/family members. However, trips organized by associations remain the only traveling opportunity for many members for at least two reasons. Firstly, a significant number of participants stated that they prefer to travel in organized groups because it minimizes stress and provides the necessary logistics. Furthermore, travelling with familiar people from their associations allows them to feel comfortable and get the most out of the travel.

“When you are surrounded by people who are aware of your blindness, then it is much easier.”

Female, member of Kruševac Association

Secondly, many participants pointed out that their financial capabilities are limited. Consequently, trips organized by associations are basically the only time they travel.

“There are a lot of needy members in our association who lack financial resources for travelling.”

Female, member of Novi Sad Association

Main **barriers** to organizing trips are:

- **Funding** – Funding is the most common obstacle according to participants. Associations usually don't have developed modes for funding trips. The resources provided by local authorities are limited. Members are often not willing to pay for themselves either because they don't have the money or because they are used to getting free trips. Also, members are expected to pay for their companions as well which additionally emphasizes the funding issue.

„We organize trips once a year, because of the financial state of the association and our members. We never travel abroad – association has no funds and the members can't pay for it themselves.“

Male, member of Split association

„Because our members are used to trips entirely financed by the association or the Federation, they are not willing to contribute.“

Male, member of Zrenjanin association

- **Logistics** – Certain members stated that they are afraid to travel alone, and that they cannot always find a companion. Also, members are faced with various technical constraints such as possession of a passports, etc. Participants from small towns state that one of the problems is that their members often live in small villages without public transport, so it would be hard for them to arrive at meeting place in time and to get home after the trip.

„Once we tried to organize a trip to Timisoara, Romania but the response was weak because many members didn't have valid passports.“

Male, member of Novi Sad association

„As this is not an urban area, it is very hard to go on a trip for us who live in small towns. When we get back in the evening there aren't any bus lines to surrounding villages. That's why the response is low.“

Male, member of Nova Gradiška association

- **Age** – Participants state that members of their association are usually elderly people who are either not interested in traveling or find them too tiresome.

Expectations from travel arrangements

○ Duration of trip and distance from destination

Majority of participants in Croatia state that day trips are their favourite. They are considered easier to organize than longer trips and are acceptable to the higher number of people; when they travel with other members of the association it is an important thing to consider because of the higher prevalence of elderly members. Some older members in Serbia also stated that they prefer day trips because they find longer ones too troublesome. Also, some prefer longer trips but only if they are well organized and with an appropriate and decent accommodation. There are participants who stated that the preferable duration of a trip depends on the distance to destination.

"If we travel to a destination that is far away, I prefer to spend a night or two nights in a hotel."

Male, member of Novi Pazar Association

„I could travel for the whole day, but association consists mostly of elderly members and it is important to think about them, longer traveling is very exhausting for them."

Male, member of Split Association

Majority of participants in Serbia are in fact indifferent to the trip duration. They enjoy both one-day and longer trips if they are well organized and provide high quality content. A smaller number of participants in Croatia concurs with Serbian members and say that they do not have preferences for the duration of travel, as long as the organization is good. That includes enough toilet breaks, comfortable bus (or another mean of transport) and knowledgeable guides.

„I don't really care about the duration of the trip as long as it has high quality and wide variety of activities, and I don't spend too much time in the room."

Male, member of Kragujevac Association

„Some trips are too long, too exhausting, and not comfortable enough. It would be great if we had a bus adjusted to the visually impaired."

Female, member of Varaždin association

Two to three hours of driving one way is considered ideal by Croatian participants – there is enough time left to spend on the destination when they arrive and drive that long doesn't require breaks.

„As we do not organize longer trips, it's important that they are not too distant so we don't spend the whole day traveling. Two to three hours is a maximum.”

Female, member of Varaždin Association

The majority of participants stated that the distance between start and destination is not too important. In case of a one-day trip, arriving at the end point of route should not take longer than 3-4 hour drive. However, if the final destination is further, the trip should last longer.

“I’ve never been in the mountains, and I would love to go. I’ve heard that there are beautiful mountains in our country.”

Female, member of Kragujevac Association

○ *Intensity and type of activities*

The preferred type of activities include nature attractions such as mountains, lakes, parks, walks, rivers, etc.; cultural tourism such as museums and theatres, historical places, monuments, museums and art galleries, castles; music tourism such as going to a music festival or other music performances; sport activities such as bowling and chess; gastro-tourism; socializing and having fun while hanging around with other members.

„I'm a historian and I love to visit museums and similar places where I can learn something, but I like free time, too.”

Female, member of Zagreb Association

„I love to visit well-known places. It would be a shame to come to Zagreb and not see the Cathedral, for example.”

Male, member of Našice Association

„I love music. I’ve never had a chance to go to a music festival.”

Male, member of Kruševac Association

The vast majority of participants pointed out that they enjoy in the diversity of attractions and experiences.

„I prefer diverse activities and attractions – sports, good food and cultural sightseeing.”

Female, member of Kragujevac Association

Participants mostly agreed that trips should not be overwhelmed with many different sights and activities, but rather provide some free time for relaxing and socializing. Running from one sight to another is not only tiring, but stressful as well. Very intensive programs are connected to feelings of rush and stress and they wish to avoid it. It is very important that they have some free time for doing whatever they want or just socializing.

„I want some breaks so I could do something I need, have a drink, hang out with other members etc. That provides a good feeling, not running from one place to another but make that trip pleasant and useful.”

Male, member of Split Association

„It would be the best if we visited 2 to 3 sights and then had some time to seat down and rest, listen to some music.”

Female, member of Kragujevac Association

„If I visit too many sights, I can't remember and feel the places.”

Female, member of Kruševac Association

○ Accommodation

Participants generally indicated that their accommodation expectations are basic and refer to good quality, cleanness and safety. The majority of them expect to have a private room (shared with one or two persons) with toilet and shower, and that it is clean and tidy.

„Every room should have its own private toilet and shower, a small fridge or something like that, and it should be clean. It's the most important thing for me – tidy and clean room.”

Male, member of Split Association

„The facility doesn't necessarily have to be specially designed and equipped. It needs to be clean, and personnel should be able to provide us extra assistance.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

However, the participants would appreciate if premises were adaptable and accessible to blind or visually impaired guests in terms of customized signage - tactile signage and contrast, including directional signs and room numbers, guiding lines throughout the hotel, colour contrast to help people distinguish outlines, tactile information added to the doorway, elevator which announces the floor or dings for each floor or floor designations provided in both tactile characters and Braille, avoiding glass walls, stairs and thresholds, extra assistance, etc.

„I don't like hotels with glass walls because I can't notice them.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

„I usually use stairs because hotel elevators rarely have tactile signs.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

„I prefer premises without thresholds because crossing them is very dangerous for the blind.”

Male, member of Subotica Association

Participants agreed that it is very important that hotel's personnel are trained to assist blind and visually impaired guests. Particularly, assistance is needed during meals such as directions to seating, explanations of table arrangements, description of placement of food and beverage, assistance with self-serve items, assistance with menu reading, etc. Also, attention should be paid to how food and beverage items are being served.

„If I travel alone, it is very important where the accommodation is and is it accessible – meaning is it easier to find my way around, is it easy to get food, how are the

meals organized – is it a self-serving buffet or something else. It would be much easier that the meals aren't self-serving based."

Female, member of Slavonski Brod Association

Travel companions and guides

When asked who they most often travel with, most of the participants say that they travel with family members if they organize the trip themselves, and with sighted travel companions if their association organizes the trip. Also, a smaller share of participants state that they mostly travel alone, but that is usually limited to well-known places.

"Some of my travels really were without sighted companions, but I went to familiar places, known space or to place I knew were accessible."

Female, member of Slavonski Brod Association

„I travel with my children or with my association. I would be afraid to travel alone."

Female, member of Kruševac Association

Very few participants from Croatia travel with a guide dog – it is not considered useful in unknown places and they think it would probably just stress the dog. In Serbia there is only one guide dog in the country, and none of the participants interviewed has a guide dog.

"I never take my guide dog to trips because I think it's a pure torture for him. He doesn't know the area and neither do I, so it's better for him to stay at home. And there's not enough room in the bus for him."

Male, member of Split Association

But, if they do travel with the dog, it is important that it is welcomed in the accommodation and allowed to follow them everywhere.

Travel guides are considered very important for Croatian members for the whole experience of the trip – participants state that a bad guide can make a trip extremely unpleasant.

"My worst travel experience was when tourist guide was very ignorant, had unpleasant remarks, was uninformed and shiftless and had no idea we were visually impaired."

Female, member of Osijek Association

On the other hand, the majority of participants has never heard about tourist guides for the blind and visually impaired people, but believes that they would be very useful. Most of them agreed that it is important that guides are trained to offer detailed audio description tours.

"I've heard that there are tourist guides for blind in the world, but not in our country."

Female, member of Kragujevac Association

"My friend is a tourist guide and when she guides a group of visually impaired she had adjusted her explanations and described historical monuments picturesquely, but I have no idea that there are special guides. Have they completed a special education or something like that?"

Male, member of Split Association

Participants who have heard about those guides consider it a great idea but are not familiar with details.

Furthermore, there are some members who believe that modern technologies would be more useful than tourist guides for blind and visually impaired people.

"I prefer audio records because I can listen to them for many times and remind myself of where I was."

Female, member of Kruševac Association

Travel experiences

- *Best experiences*

Participants agree that best travel experiences usually don't have much to do with travel destination, travel duration or mean of transportation, but with some of the following:

- **Kind and helpful people** – As they sometimes depend on other people for help, participants find helpful tourist guides, bus drivers etc. essential for good and pleasant journey. They mostly need help with finding their seat or their bus/tram/plane.

„I have great experiences with international plane traveling. Those people, it is really obvious that they were trained to deal with visually impaired people. When you come to the airport, they organize someone who will lead you through all counters you have to visit before flight; when entering the plane there are stewardesses who are completely familiar with information that there will be a blind person in the plane.“

Male, member of Osijek Association

- **Feeling of equality** – Some participant state that best trips were when they could feel equal to other, sighted people and not inferior to them. It usually happened when travel is carefully planned and activities are tailored respecting their needs – e.g. organizing more auditory or tactile activities.
- **Adjusted signs** – If the signs are adjusted to their needs (e.g. it's auditory or in Braille), participants feel safer and more independent, which adds to the pleasant experience.
- **Good organization** - reduces stress arising from unfamiliar environment and allows participants to relax and enjoy.
- **Accessibility** – visiting museums, exhibitions, etc. that offer audio description, verbal imaging, touch tours or tactile reception.

„My best travel experience comes from the Balkan Chess Champion for Blind and visually impaired in Sofia. It was very well organized and planned, and the guide was explaining everything so picturesquely.“

Male, member of Kragujevac Association

„I turn around and always find someone kind to help me.“

Female, member of Krrusevac Association

- **Tour guides** - providing detailed verbal explanations, tactile activities, special assistance.
- **Time spent with family and friends** – regardless of the destination, every journey is a great emotional experience because it's an opportunity to socialize with family, friends or other members of an association.
- *Worst experiences*

Majority of participants can't recall any negative experience from traveling. If something negative happened, it is usually tied to one of the following:

- **Impolite people** – some participants have experienced situations where nobody wanted to help them, especially if their disability wasn't visible (e.g. they weren't carrying the white cane) or their needs weren't considered (e.g. when they needed to change buses).

„When traveling somewhere, everybody pushes you around like you don't have the white cane at all, like you don't have any disability, nobody pays attention to you.“

Female, member of Varaždin Association

- **Lack of experience** – it is usually more comfortable for participants to travel to familiar places where they can find their way around easily. Unfamiliar places cause discomfort and it's easy to make a mistake when instructions aren't clear.

„I prefer going to places I've already been to. I don't like going to new places because I don't know what will wait for me there. Generally, there isn't any support so you usually have to be self-sufficient.“

Female, member of Varaždin Association

„Once I put salt in my soup instead of pepper because the saltshaker wasn't marked properly. It was a very unpleasant experience.“

Female, member of Krusevac Association

„I live in Novi Sad but only two times I went to the Fortress because it is not accessible, it has too many stairs and it is dark.”

Male, member of Novi Sad Association

- **Unadjusted traffic** – some participants have experienced problems when arriving in cities where traffic was not adjusted to their needs, e.g. there were no audible traffic lights.

Modern technologies and travel

The majority of older participants stated that they do not use the smartphone or any applications because they consider it more suitable for younger people or lack funds to get it. They mostly use simple audible phones, but generally, have the positive attitude toward using the applications.

„I was delighted with a mobile phone in the Museum in Vienna which provided me with audio descriptions in Serbian language.”

Male, member of Novi Sad Association

„We usually don't use mobile applications but go on familiar or recommended places. It would be great to find accommodation over application, check what interesting thing we could visit there, what is happening etc.”

Female, member of Karlovac Association

Even though they all believe that modern technologies could be very useful during travelling, the majority prefer well trained guides, tactile tools, audio descriptions, etc.

„Using IT technologies requires high level of concentration. While I am holding a mobile phone in my hand and listening to what it is saying, my movement is limited.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

Tactile maps are considered very useful and they would like to see more of them. They think they would help them to imagine the place they are visiting and help them navigate through it, especially to those who are blind.

„I believe tactile maps would facilitate independent moving of the blind person through the new places and would definitely give more information about the place. I think it would be nice to have maps of the interior in hotels or other frequently visited places. They would also greatly affect the independence of the blind person because it's important to know where your room is, where the elevator, dining room is, emergency exits etc. Tactile maps are rather neglected nowadays and they should be used more.”

Female, Slavonski Brod Association

Others find mobile applications and navigation very useful and use them often. They are usually simple navigation applications and there is nothing special they would recommend about them.

„I don't use anything special, anything rare. I use things that sighted people use – maps, navigation, searching where some things are etc.”

Male, member of Osijek Association

All participants agreed that every tool that could help them during their travelling is more than welcome. An application providing audio information about a particular sight in terms of attractions, accommodation, prices, etc. would be very helpful.

„I've heard about mobile phone applications and about a hand-glove that allows blind people to read.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

„In Lugano, Switzerland I've experienced talking crosswalk signals.”

Male, member of Leskovac Association

„I liked the audio descriptions in Brankovina, the birthplace of Desanka Maksimovic.”

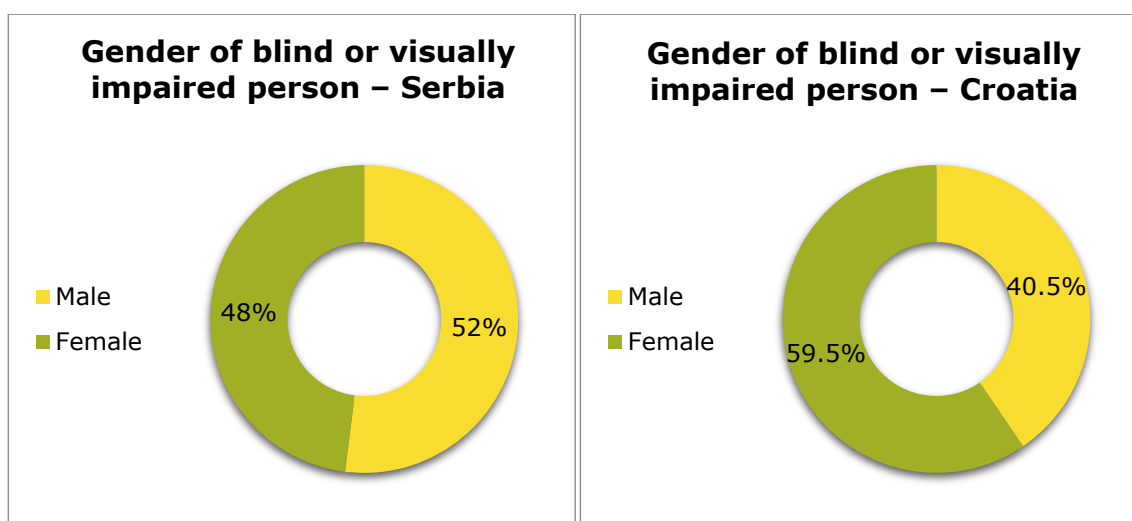
Female, member of Kruševac Association

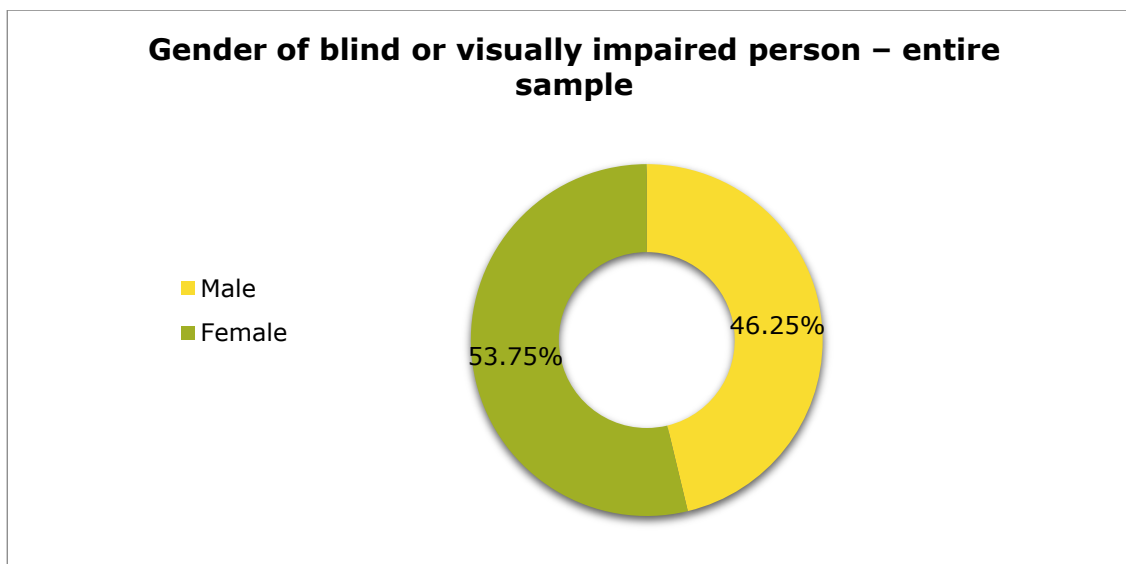
Survey of travel companions

The profile of travellers and their companions

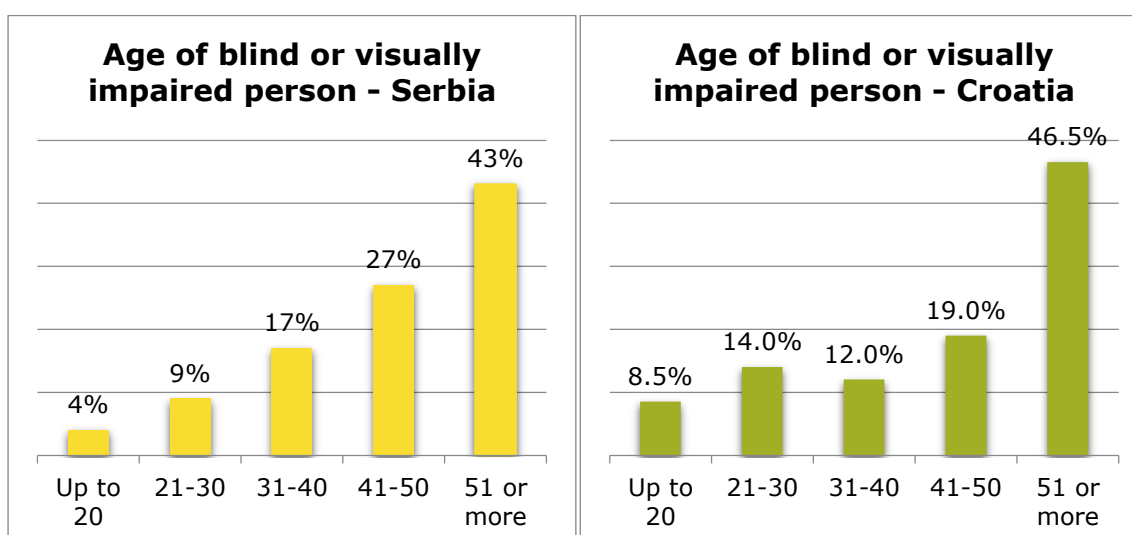
The first point of interest was the profile of blind or visually impaired persons and their companions in terms of age, gender, education level and working status.

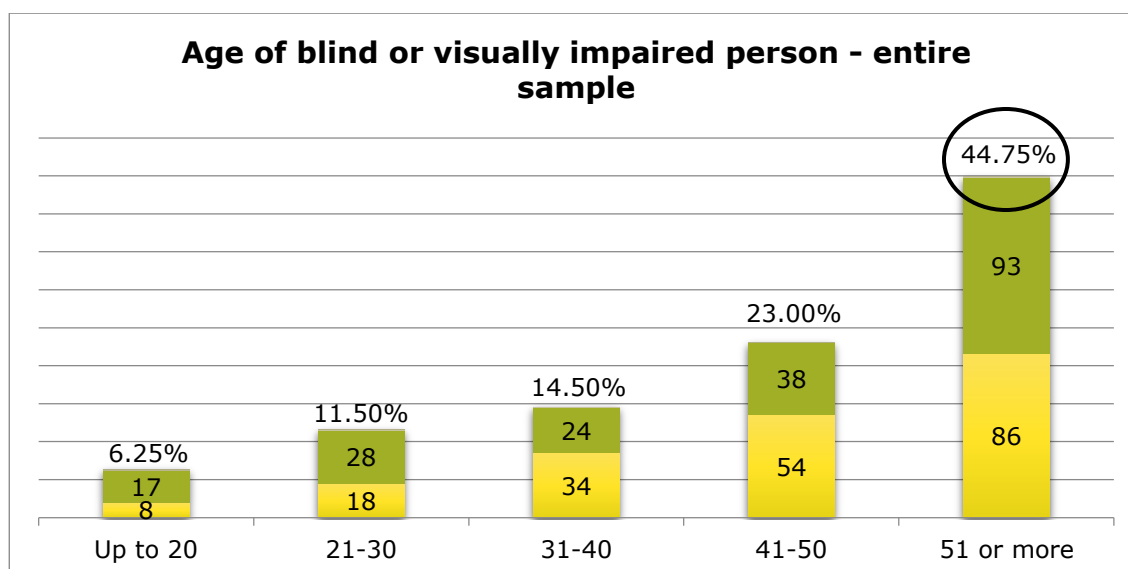
The gender of blind or visually impaired tourism traveller in the sample of both countries is, more or less, evenly distributed – 46.25% are male and 53.75% are female. In Serbia the gender distribution is almost even, comprising 52% male and 48% female. In Croatian sample majority of the blind and visually impaired persons are female - 59.5%, while male blind and visually impaired persons comprise 40.5% of the sample. The results in the context of gender are adequate, since both sexes are fairly represented.





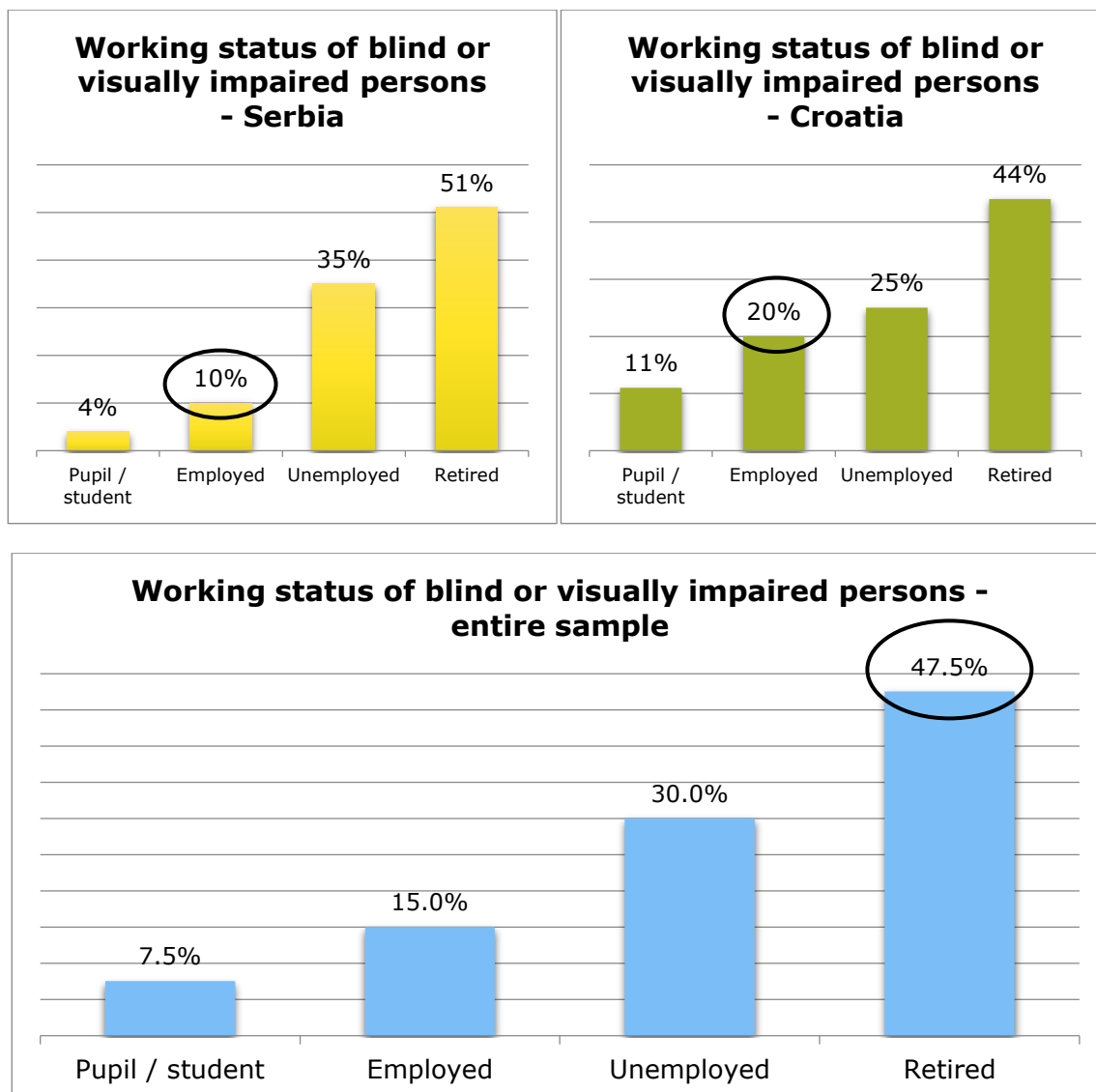
Regarding the age of blind and visually impaired tourism travellers, the sample including both countries comprised 44.75% of older people over 51 of age. It is evident that each subsequent age category has an increasing number of persons. This trend is clearly visible at the level of the entire sample and in Serbia, while in Croatia the disruption from this trend is evident in just one part – there are more people in the category of 21-30 years (28 persons) in relation to the category 31-40 years (24 persons). The above mentioned fact that most people in the entire sample are in age category 51 and older speaks in favour of the fact that most people become blind during life, due to illness or injuries.



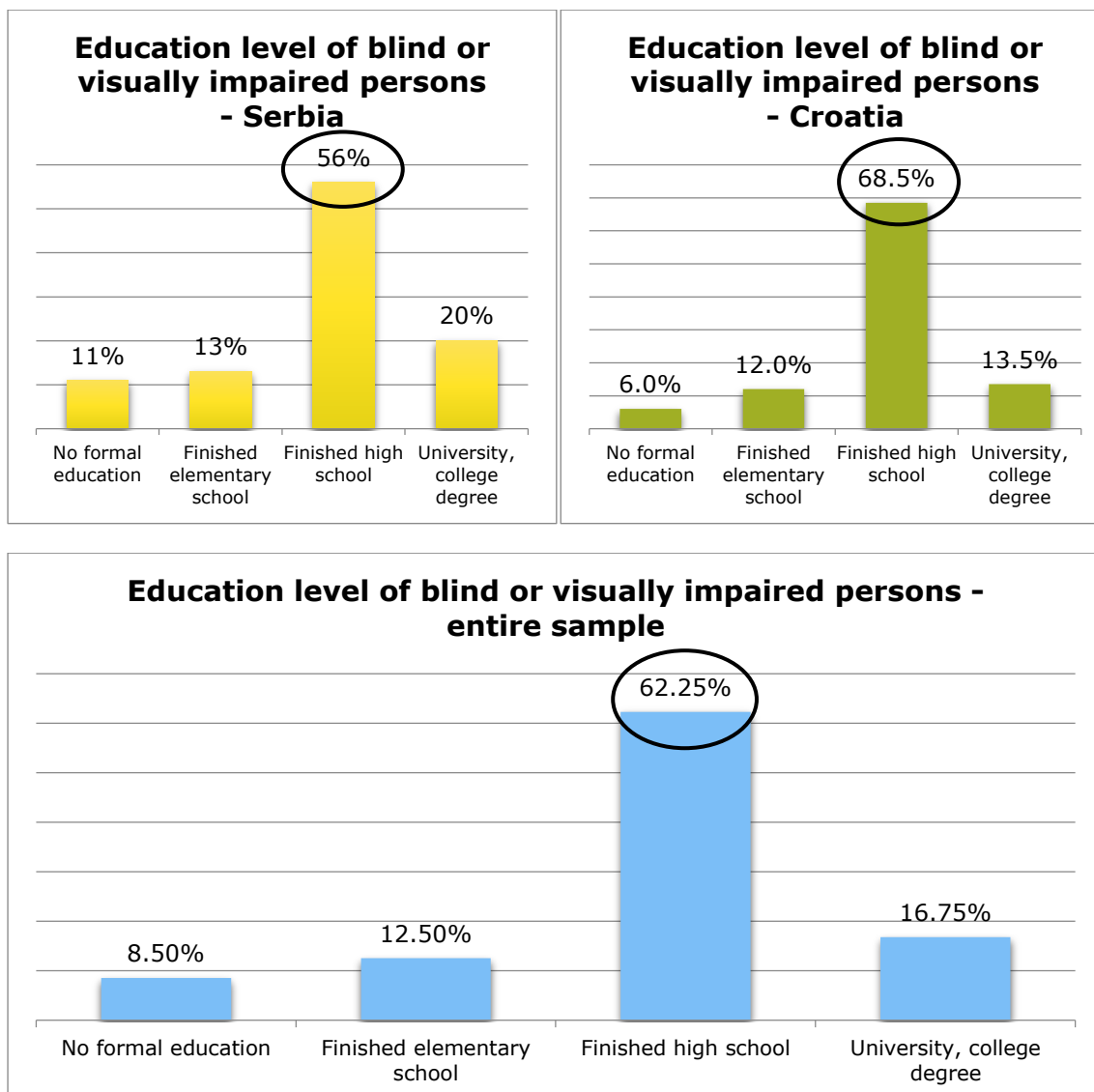


In accordance with the previously-mentioned age distribution, at the entire sample level, the percentage of retired blind or visually impaired persons is 47.5%. When Serbia and Croatia are individually considered, the situation is the same. Number of retired persons is 51% and 44%, respectively. At the level of the entire sample, 30% are unemployed, while only 15% are employed. The situation in individual countries is better in Croatia, where 20% of blind or visually impaired are employed, while 25% are unemployed. These are significantly better results than in Serbia, where 35% of blind or visually impaired are unemployed, and only 10% are employed.

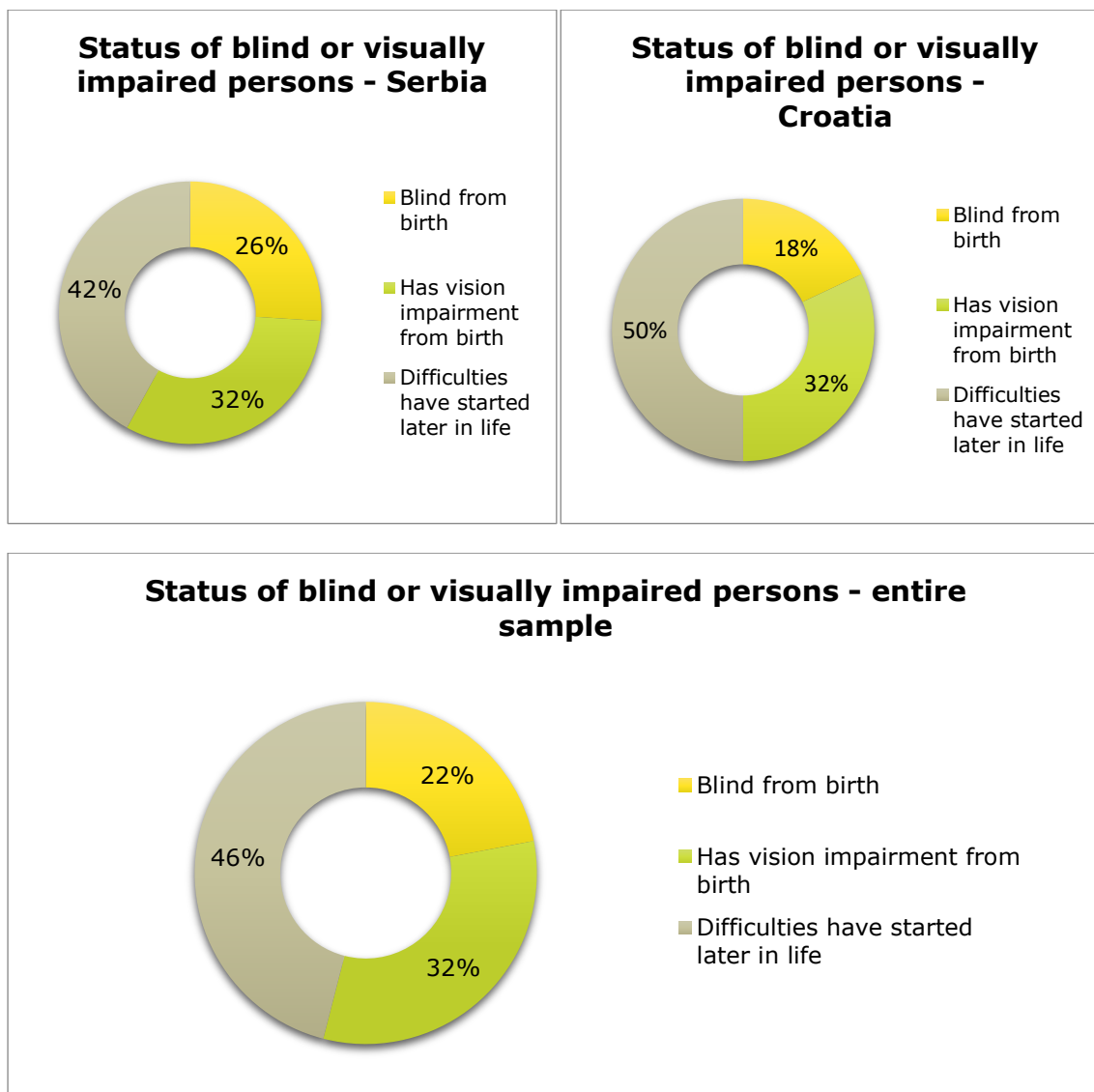
Pupils and students represent 7.5% of the entire sample. Serbia has only 4% of the blind or visually impaired pupils and students, while this number is significantly higher in Croatia, and amounts to 11%. The obtained results considering employment can be interpreted in the sense of better economic situation in Croatia, which is also a member of the EU, and has considerably more developed principles of inclusion of persons with disabilities, which will be discussed later in more detail.



Further on, in the sample of Serbia, compared to Croatia, there is 1% more of blind or visually impaired persons who have finished elementary school, while 6.5% more have obtained university or college degree. On the other hand, 11% of blind or visually impaired tourism travellers do not have formal education in Serbia, which is 5% more than in Croatia. The number of persons with tertiary education in the sample of Serbia is higher than the country average - 16.24% of the population completed some form of tertiary education. On the other hand, in the sample of Croatia, the situation is lower than the country average, as there are 13.5% of tertiary educated blind or visually impaired persons in the sample, while in Croatia 17.6% of the population is tertiary educated.

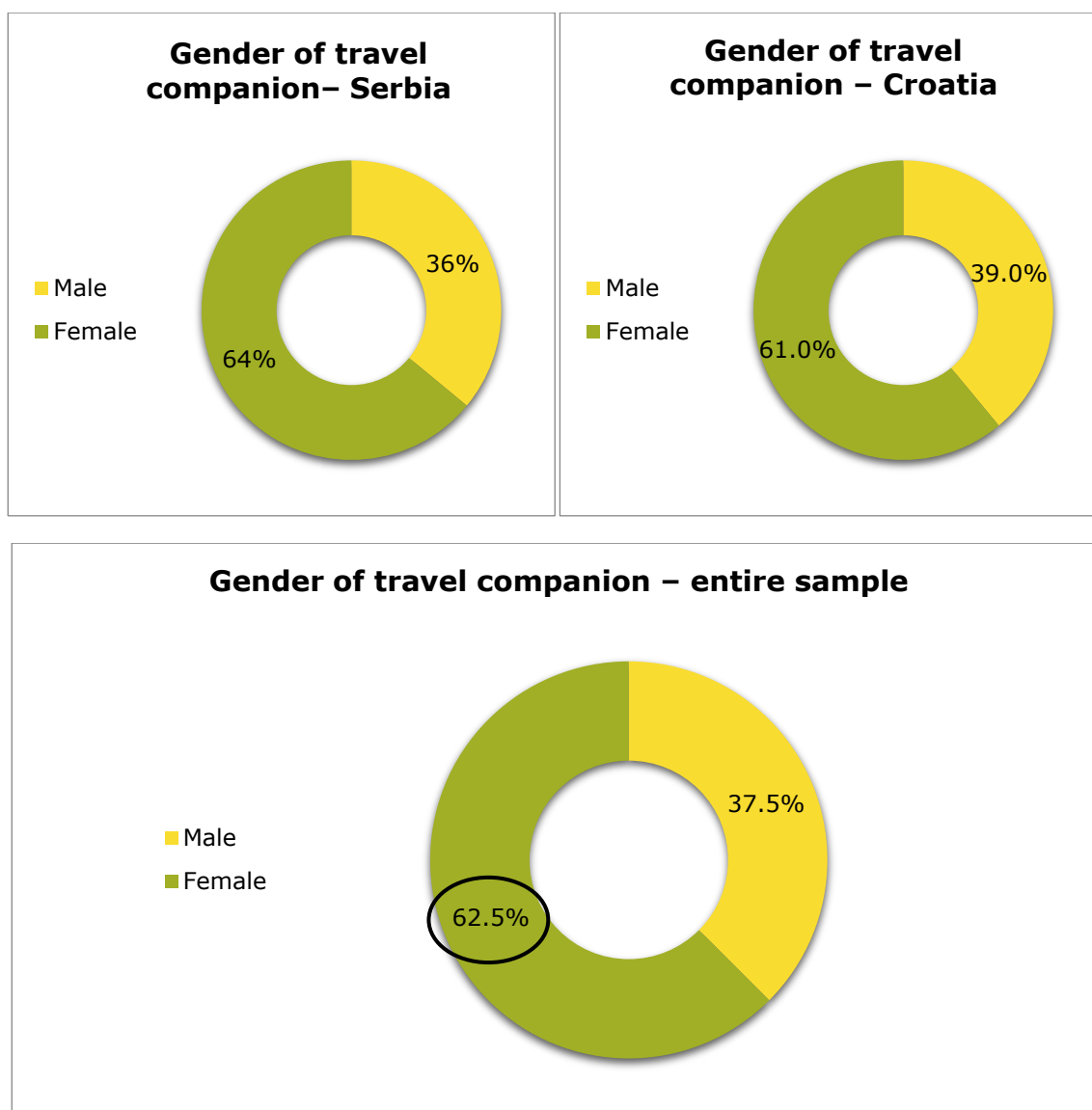


Another point of interest was whether the vision difficulties of blind or visually impaired persons started later in life, or were present from birth. Results for Croatia are evenly distributed – 50% of blind or visually impaired tourism travellers have difficulties that started later in life, and 50% have blindness or visual impairment from birth. In the Serbian sample, 42% of blind or visually impaired tourism travellers have difficulties that started later in life, and 58% have blindness or visual impairment from birth. On the entire sample level, 22% of blind or visually impaired tourism travellers have been blind from birth, 32% have visual impairment from birth, whereas 46% have difficulties with vision that started later in life.

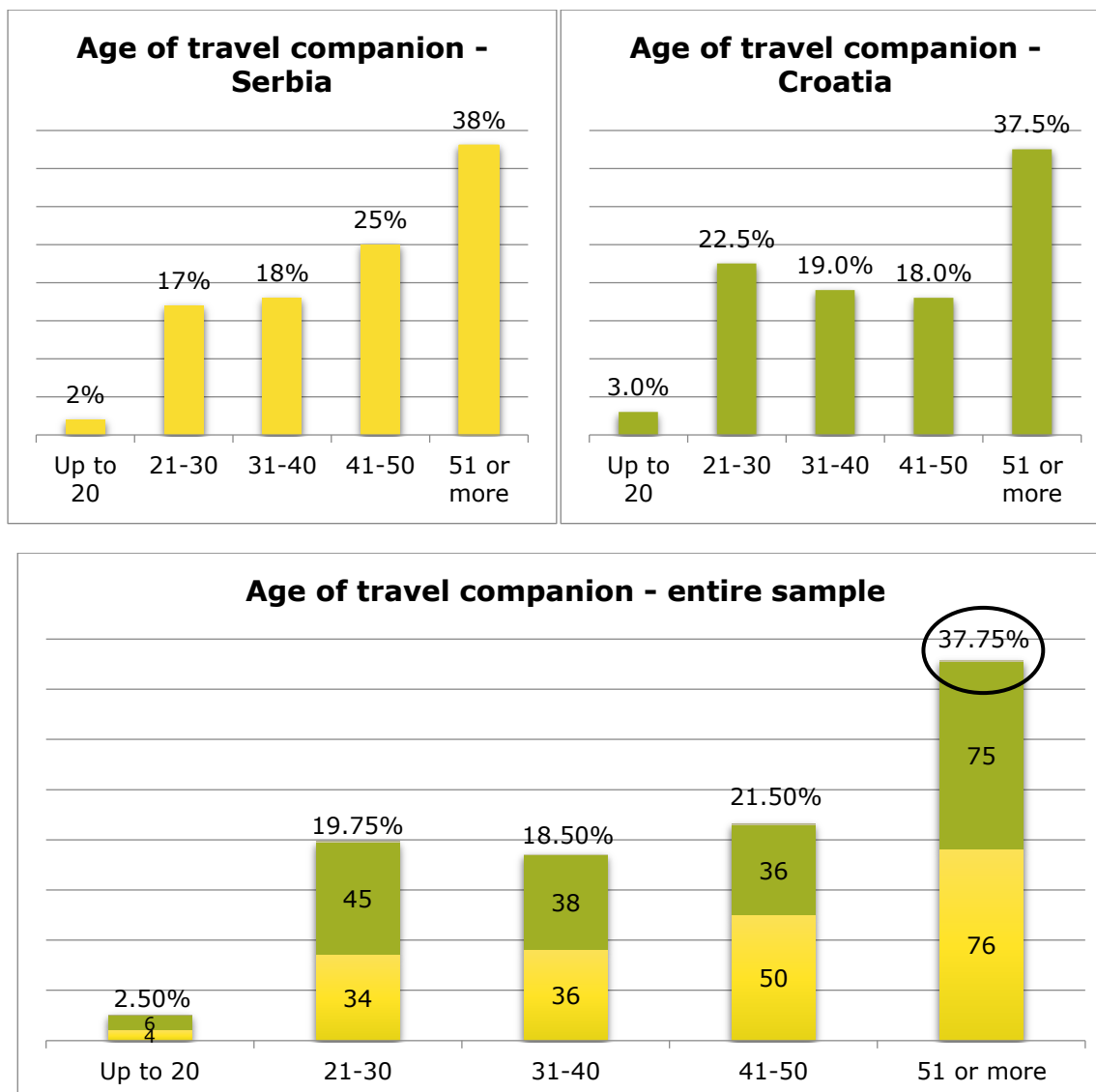


After examining some relevant characteristics of the blind and visually impaired, the analysis of characteristics of the travelling companions was conducted.

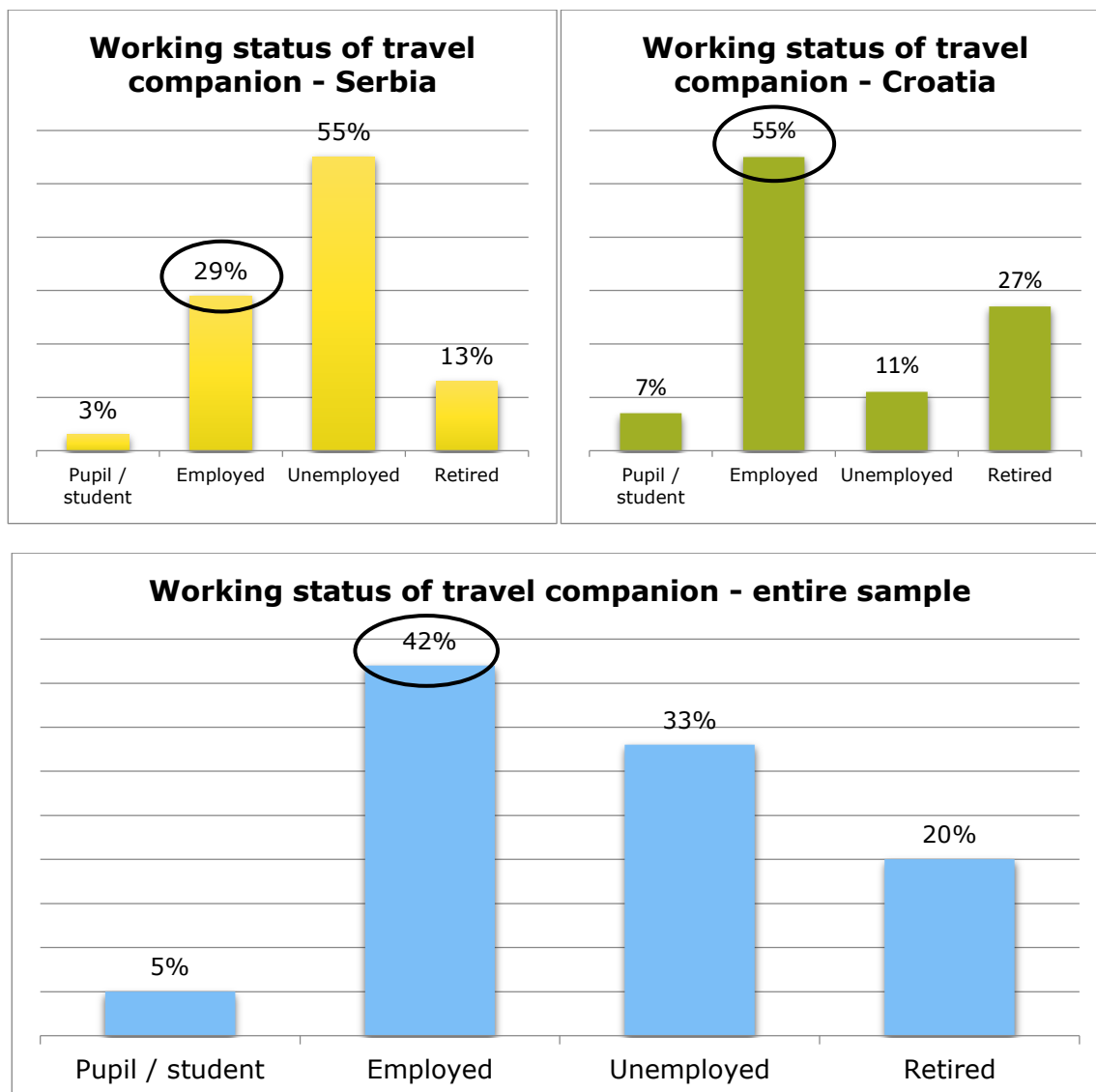
The gender of travel companion of blind or visually impaired tourist traveller in our sample of both countries is as follows: 62.50% are female and 37.50% are male. These results do not differ much when compared between Serbia and Croatia. And when compared to the gender of blind or visually impaired tourist traveller, where the division between genders is almost equal, in the role of travel companion of blind or visually impaired tourist traveler there are more women.



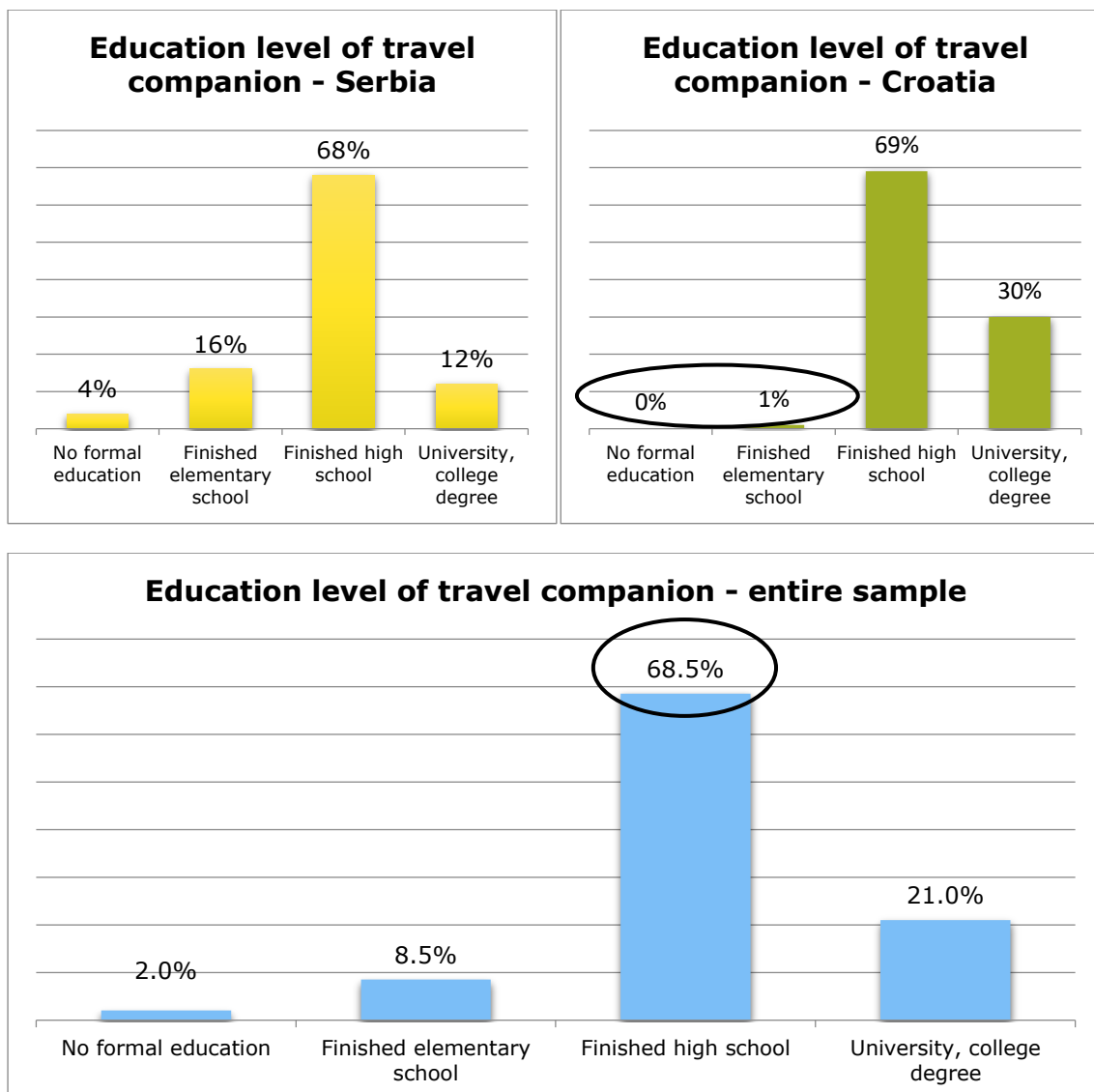
Regarding the age of travel companions at the entire sample level, the following three age groups are distinguished: 21-30, 31-40, and 41-50 which are on average evenly represented (19.75%, 18.50%, and 21.50% respectively). The largest number of travel companions is in the age category of 51 plus (37.75%), while only 2.5% of travel companions are up to 20 years of age. There are no significant differences when individually observing samples of Serbia and Croatia, as they both show the same trends.



When observing the working status of the travel companions, there are significant differences between the results in Serbia and Croatia. While the majority of travel companions in Croatia are employed - 55%, in Serbia the percentage is only 29%. On the other hand, 55% of travel companions in Serbia are unemployed, while in Croatia this percentage is 11%. Furthermore, almost twice as many travel companions are retired in Croatia. Significant disproportion in the number of employed travel companions can, once again, be interpreted in the sense of better economic situation in Croatia, which is a member of the EU. At the level of the entire sample, most travel companions are employed - 42% while 33% are unemployed. Furthermore, 20% are retired, and only 5% of travel companions are pupils/students.



Considering the education level of travel companions, the situation in Croatia is significantly better than in Serbia. Travel companions with a university or college degree amount to 30% in Croatia, whereas in Serbia the percentage is significantly lower at 12%. In Croatia there are no travel companions with no formal education, and only 1% finished only elementary school. On the other hand, in Serbia 4% of travel companions do not have any formal education, while 16% have finished only elementary school. The majority of travel companions in both countries have finished high school – 68% in Serbia and 69% in Croatia. As it is previously mentioned, high school has been finished by the majority of travel companions in the entire sample i.e. 68.5%, while 21% obtain university or college degree.



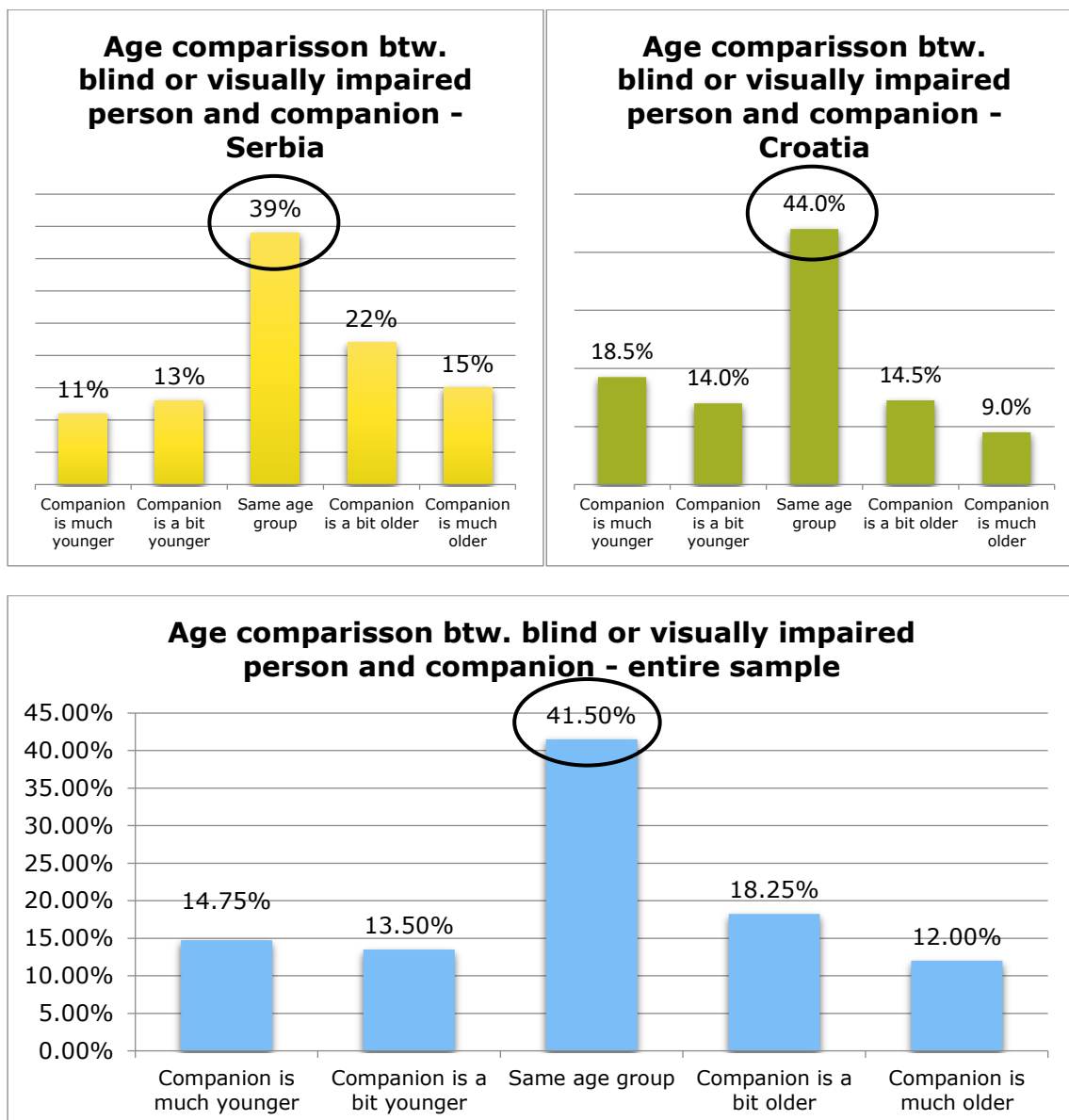
Additionally, in order to understand more profoundly the relation between the blind or visually impaired person and the traveling companions, the comparison of socio-demographic parameters was made:

Firstly, we examined the gender combination of traveling pairs. The highest share is of mixed gender pairs (42% for Serbia, 43.5% for Croatia, and 42.75% for the entire sample), followed by female pairs. Male pairs are the least frequent combination.

Table 1 Gender combination of traveling pairs

		Visually impaired person – Serbia	
		Male	Female
Companion Croatia	Male	23%	13%
	Female	29%	35%
		Visually impaired person - Croatia	
		Male	Female
Companion Serbia	Male	18%	21%
	Female	22,5%	38,5%
		Visually impaired person – whole sample	
		Male	Female
Companion entire sample	Male	20,5%	17%
	Female	25,75%	36,75%

Secondly, the age group of the traveling pairs was compared. The highest share is of pairs within the same age group. The small age difference i.e. one answer category older and younger is found in total of 35% of Serbian travelling pairs and in 28.5% of Croatian travelling pairs. The large age difference i.e. two answer categories older and younger is observed in total of 26% of Serbian travelling pairs and 27.5% of Croatian travelling pairs.

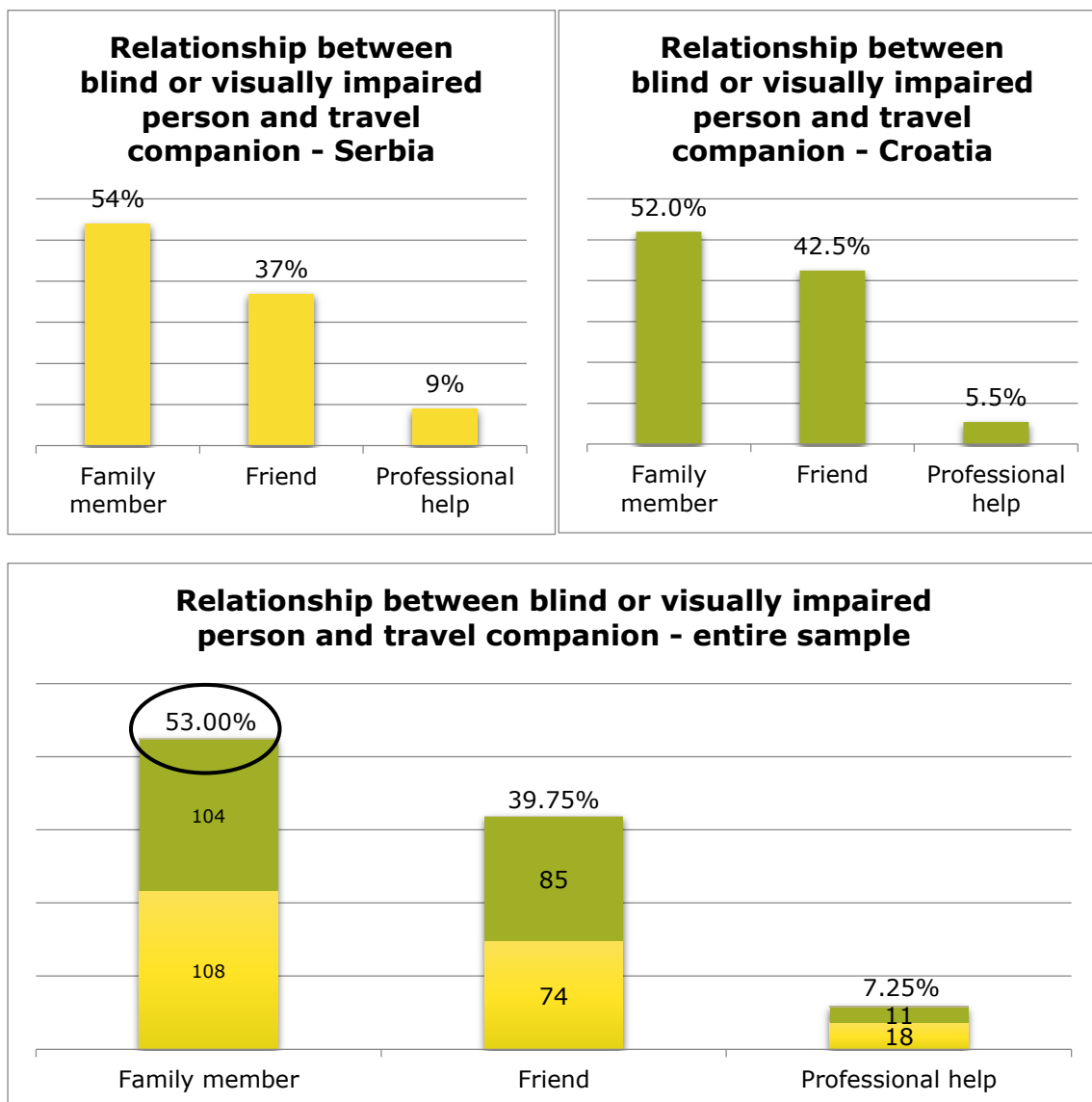


The relationship between blind or visually impaired persons and travel companions

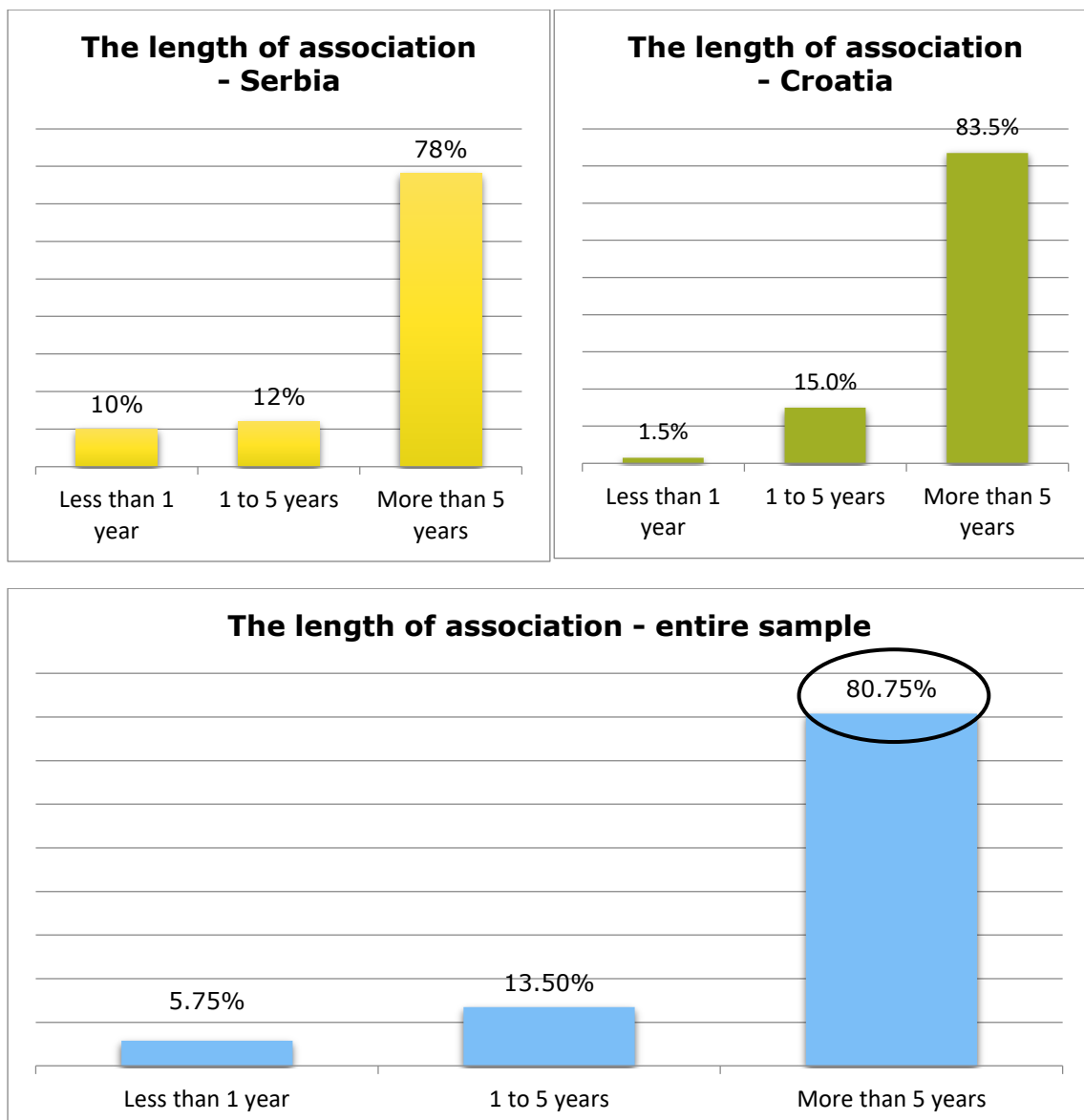
The further point of interest was the relationship between the visually impaired persons and their travel companions, so the nature of their relationship, length of their association and frequency of traveling together were probed.

The results show that in most cases visually impaired persons and their companions are members of the same family (53% of the entire sample), while 39.75% accounts for friends and only 7.25% of pair relationships are professionally based. Somewhat smaller share of pairs are friends 39.75% for the whole sample. Very small percentage of pairs

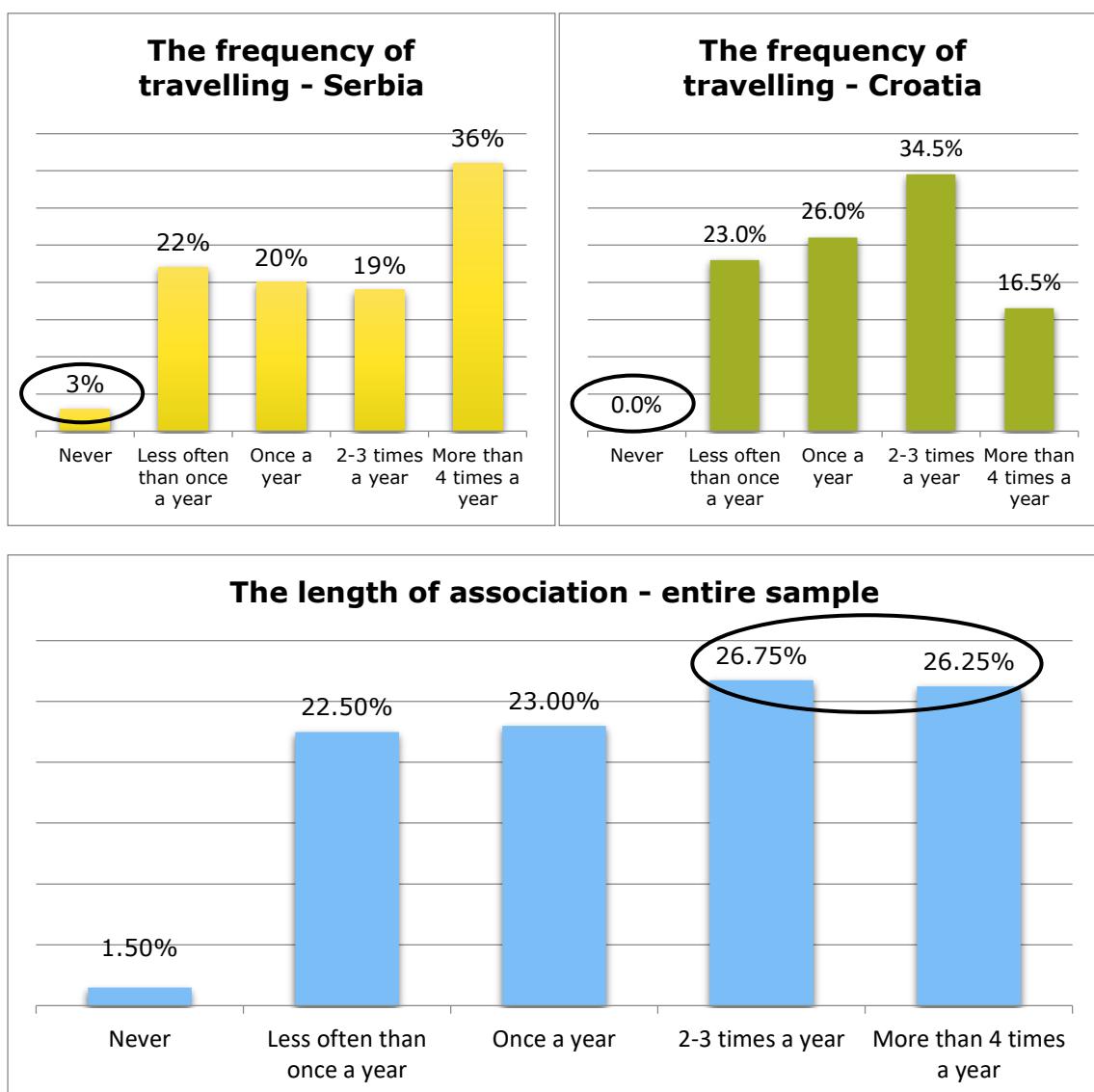
has been formed on the basis of professional relationship – 7.25% for the whole sample. Regarding the relationship between blind or visually impaired persons and their companions, the differences in the results for Serbia and Croatia are negligible.



Considering that family relationship is dominant between blind or visually impaired persons and travel companions, it is not unexpected that the majority of travelling companions know each other for more than 5 years. This is evident in both country samples separately and consequently in the entire sample (80.75%), as well. Shorter association lengths are mentioned significantly less often, especially in Croatia, where these types of relationships comprise only 1.5% of all relationships.



When observing the frequency of travelling, the majority of travelling pairs travel 2-3 times a year (26.75%). However, almost all categories (from less frequently than once a year to more than 4 times a year) are almost identically represented, varying from 22.5% for less than once a year to 26.75% for 2-3 times a year. When observing samples from individual countries, there are noticeable differences. In Serbia, 36% of travelling pairs travel more than 4 times a year, while in Croatia 34.5% of travelling passengers travels 2-3 times a year. It is particularly interesting that, while there are no travelling pairs in Croatia who have never travelled together, in Serbia they represent 3% of the sample. The assumption is that they are friends or members of the family of blind and visually impaired persons who have an oral agreement that they will travel together but have not yet had the opportunity to do so.

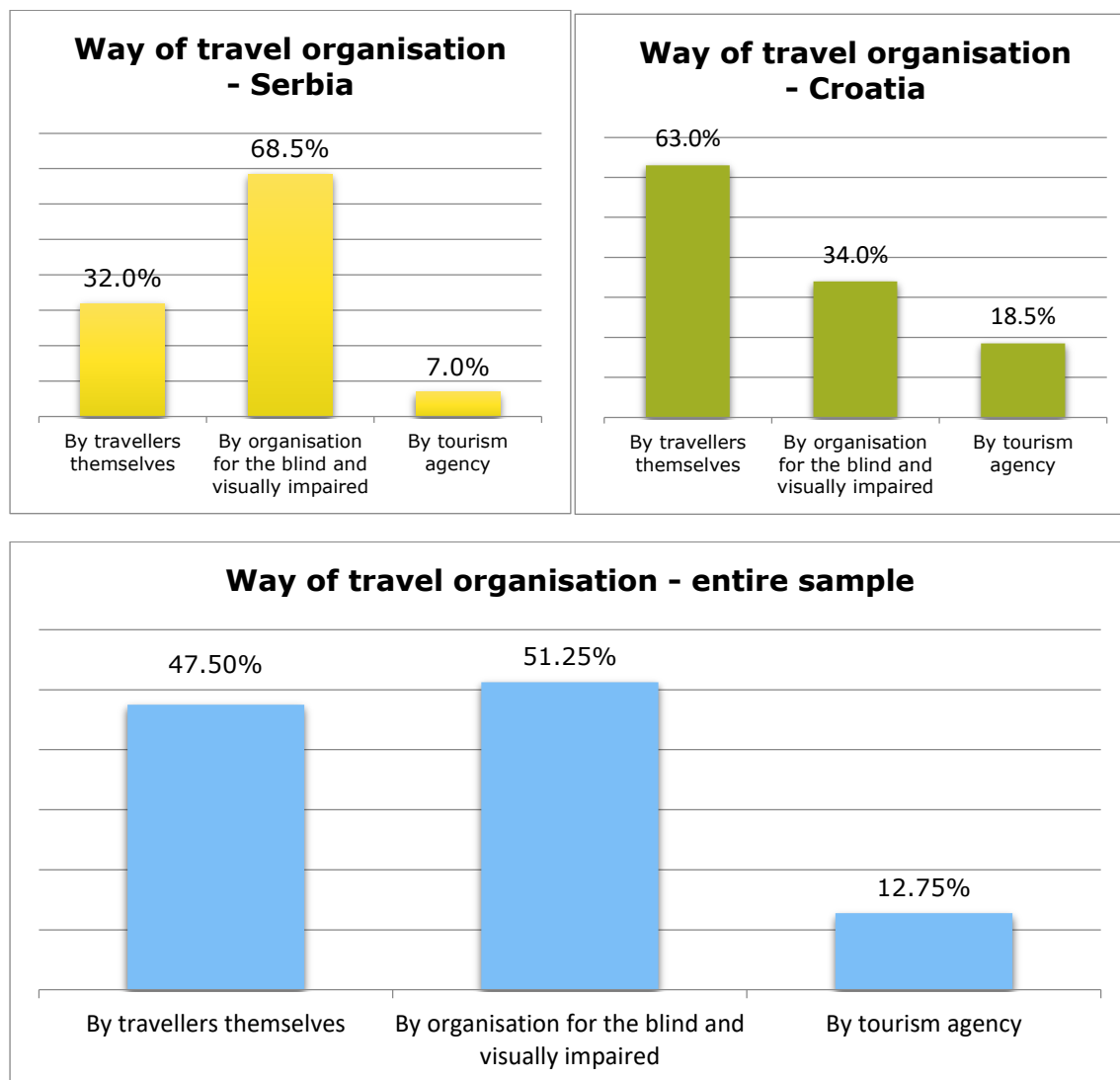


Different aspects of travel arrangement

In order to explore the current travel organisation, the respondents were asked several questions.

Firstly, the way of travel organization was analysed. In the sample of Croatia, the highest share of journeys is organized by travellers themselves (63%). Travels organized by associations account for a significantly smaller share (34%), while the lowest share refers to travels organized through tourist agencies. On the other hand, in the sample of Serbia, the highest share of journeys is organized by associations of blind and visually impaired persons (68.5%), while a significantly smaller percentage

was organized by travellers themselves (32%), and similarly to Croatia, travels organized through tourist agencies account for the smallest share. On the level of the entire sample, the share of travels organized by associations and by travellers themselves is almost identical.

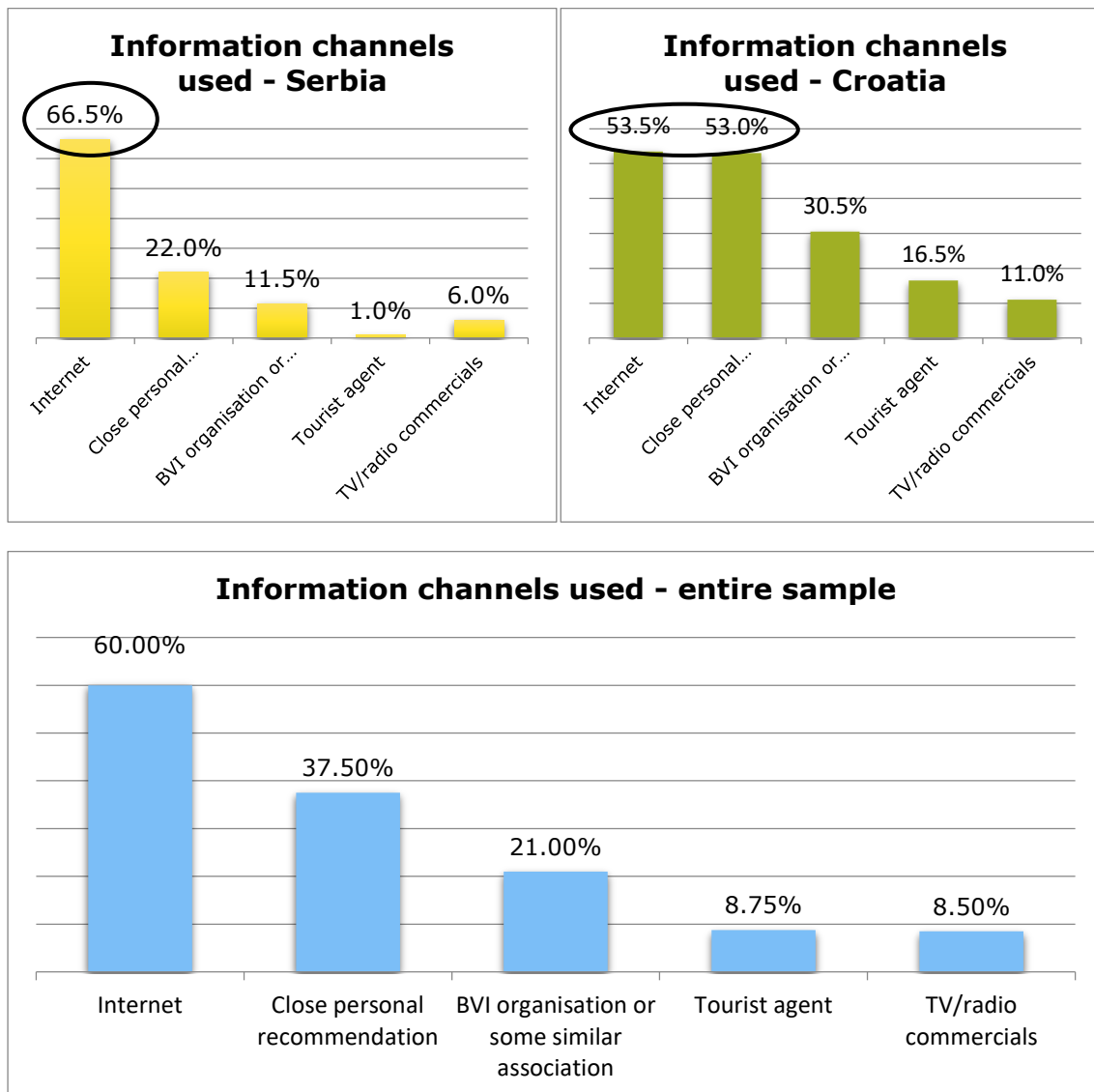


Few remarks are necessary to further elaborate the previous point. On the level of the entire sample, blind and visually impaired persons of the age 31 or over, as well as those unemployed or retired tend to participate more often in travels organized by associations in comparison with other surveyed participants.

Also, people from towns say that they participate in travels organized by associations more often than those from cities.

Pupils, students and participants up to 30 years of age more often participate in travels organized by tourist agencies.

Secondly, we explored the commonly used information channels. Internet and close people recommendation are most often used channels when organising journeys in Croatia, while in Serbia the most dominant information channel is Internet. Other information channels are less often mentioned.

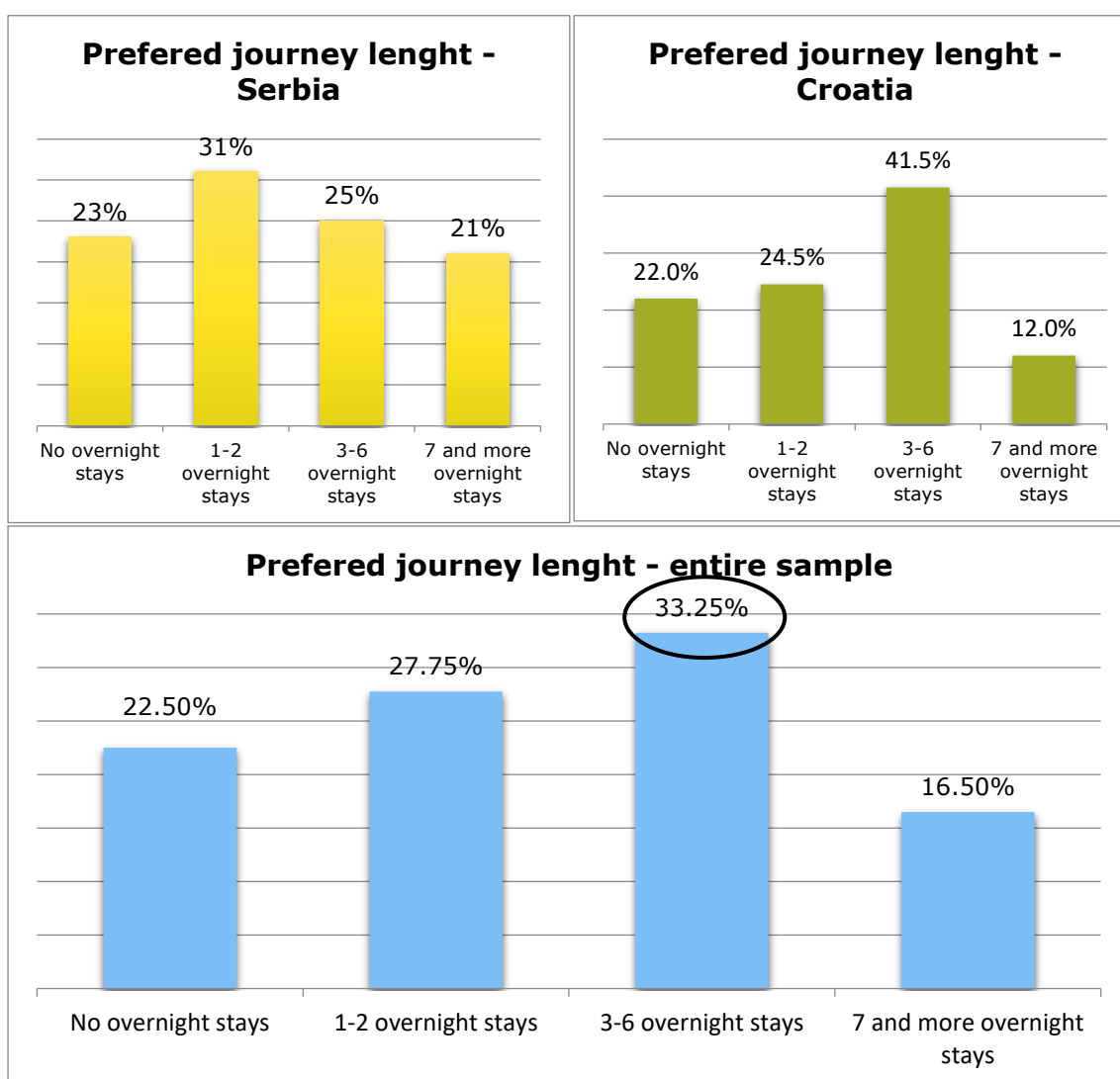


Blind or visually impaired people aged 51 and over significantly more often gather information through associations and similar organizations than younger people.

Pupils and students mostly gather information on Internet while employed and those up to 30 years of age use Internet and tourist agent recommendations significantly more than other groups.

People who live in smaller towns more often say that they gather information through associations, while those from bigger towns more often inform themselves on the Internet.

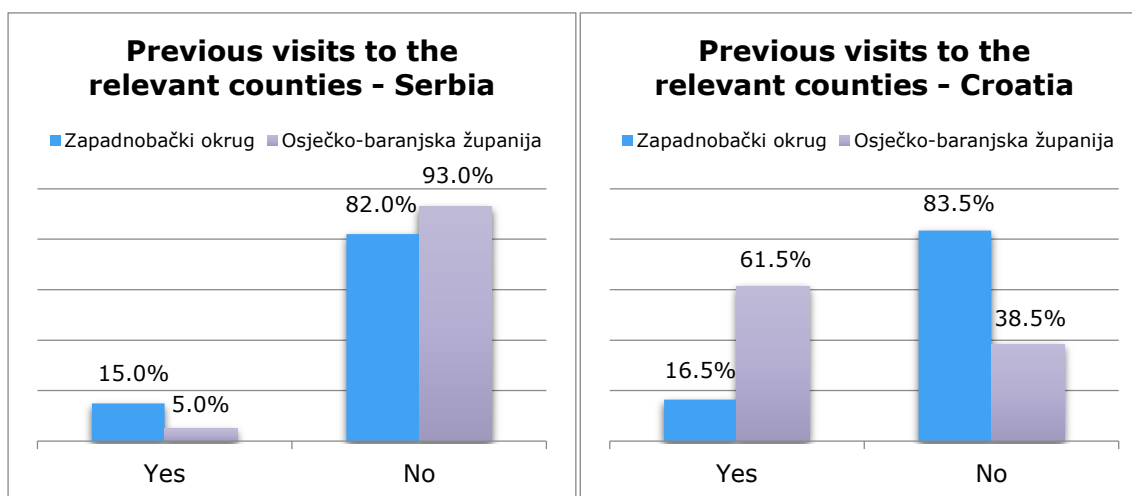
In addition, the respondents were asked to highlight the ideal duration of an organised travel. The majority of respondents in Croatia prefer 3-6 overnight stays i.e. journey length up to one week. That is also the preferred journey length for the sample. The preferred journey length of respondents in Serbia differs maximally by 10% between categories. One-day trips and shorter journeys are preferred by smaller number of the respondents. Only 16.5% of respondents think that journey with seven and more overnight stays is ideal.

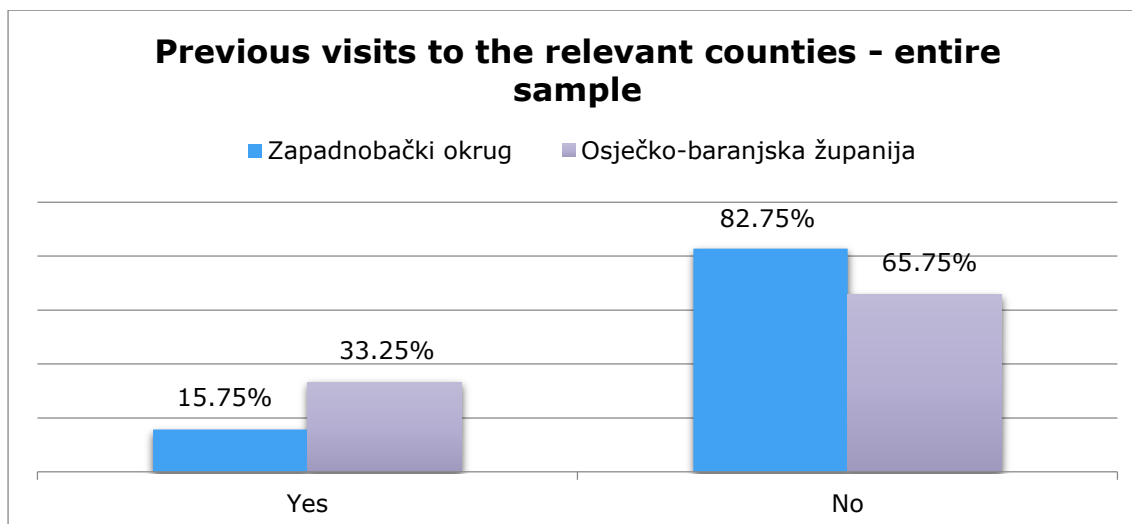


Participants aged 51 and over, as well as those who are retired significantly more often say they prefer travels with no overnight stays. Among those who prefer 3-6 overnight stays, pupils, students and those aged up to 30 years make up the largest share, while employed people prefer 7 and more overnight stays.

Participants who live in smaller towns say they prefer trips with no overnight stays more often than those who live in bigger towns, while those in cities find both journeys with 3-6 overnight stays and 7 or more overnight stays ideal.

Due to the specific project interest, the respondents were asked whether they had previous visiting experience to Osijek-Baranja County in Croatia and West-Bačka District in, Serbia. The majority of respondent in Croatia stated that they visited Osijek-Baranja County, while only 16.5% visited West-Bačka District. The vast majority of the respondents in Serbia stated that they never visited the above-mentioned county/district. At the entire sample level, 82.75% of respondent have never visited West-Bačka District, while 65.75% of respondents have never visited Osijek-Baranja County. These statistical figures point out to the excellent selection of the region for activities on the VISITUS project.





Summary of the survey

- The majority of both visually impaired travellers and their companions are female aged over 51 with finished secondary education. The majority of blind or visually impaired travellers are retired, while the majority of companions in Croatia are employed and in Serbia are unemployed.
- Female travelling pairs account for the highest share, but mixed gender pairs form the majority of travelling pairs in total. Male pairs are less often found. The most travelling pairs are in the same age group.
- In regards to relationship, the traveling companion is either family member or friend, while professional help usage is rare. The majority of respondents travel 2-3 times a year or more than 4 times a year.
- The majority of journeys are organized by visually impaired persons and their companions or by associations of the blind and visually impaired. For the purpose of obtaining the information, internet and personal recommendation are used most often.
- An ideal journey length is 3-6 overnight stays. Almost one half of the respondents think that shorter length i.e. one day trips and 1-2 overnight stays is ideal.
- The majority of respondents have never had touristic visits to either Osijek-Baranja County or West-Backa District.
- The most important elements related to organized journeys are: cultural and historical heritage inclusion, adaptation of destination and hotel to specific needs of visually impaired group of tourists, financial support, professional guide and entertainment.

4. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST POTENTIALS IN THE CROSS BORDER AREA OF OSIJEK-BARANJA COUNTY AND WEST BACKA DISTRICT

Considering the main objective of the project, a situation analysis of potentials for the development of tourism in the cross border area was conducted. A systematic list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourist potentials in the targeted area is created based on the assessment of existing natural, physical and human resources, factors, capacities, etc.

SWOT Analysis of tourist potentials in cross border area

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourable geographic position - on the Danube border area; • Richness in natural resources (e.g. famous Slavonian forests); • Richness in complementary natural values (e.g. Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje); • Infrastructure and human potentials; • A unique cultural-historical heritage; • Capabilities and ambitions of existing economic subjects; • National and international events - event tourism, events. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant depopulation trends; • Poor tourist infrastructure; • Undeveloped brand of the region and tourist products; • A shortage of accommodation facilities; • Current organization of urban and rural areas; • Deficiency of human resources in quality and quantity terms; • Poor legislation in the field of tourism.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation and EU policies in favour of tourism development; • Utilization of pre-accession funds for cross-border cooperation; • Current market trends in product development (tours, Danube cruises, etc.) • Adaptation of Sombor airport for tourist charter traffic • Cooperation with neighbouring counties and cross-border cooperation; • Establishment of theme parks and Pannonian Peace Park; • Animating population and their involvement in tourism; • Improving branding and management and marketing of tourism products. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation towards new models of agricultural development in contrast with the development of tourism with higher added value; • Lack of means and actions of preventing population outflow in short term; • Maintaining a status-quo while waiting for the new administrative organization of the country; • Budgetary constraints for tourism development; • Low purchasing power of domestic tourist demand; • Neglecting domestic science and engineering in planning and development of tourism; • Further economic decline.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS – USE OF VISITUS RESULTS FOR POLICY MAKERS

1. **Blind and visually impaired travel cards** - system of benefits for blind and visually impaired travellers (discounts for non-limited number of tickets, free of charge travel for personal assistants and companions, etc.). As funding is one of the most important obstacles for the enhancement of touristic practice of blind and visually impaired, local and national institutions have to design a system of benefits in order to provide incentives for those who are willing to travel but facing lack of financial resources.
2. **Development of customer support** for people with disabilities including blind and visually impaired travellers on the local bus and train stations. Blind and visually impaired are facing various technical challenges when moving from one location to another. Official bus and other travel stations usually do not have regular service of support to blind people when arriving to the station, going to toilettes, buying tickets, requiring specific information, finding routes, etc. Customer support service – online/phone/physical would make travel easier and more comfortable for blind travellers.
3. **Accessible design of public spaces, community settings and applications** for blind and visually impaired. Design of public spaces, accommodation, touristic points and other buildings and facilities should be developed to reflect the most restrictive requirements from related Rulebooks. Accessible solutions are of vital importance regarding the enhancement of tourism for all disabled group of tourists. Unlike Croatia, blind persons in Serbia do not have institution of Ombudsman. This could be important channel of communication with Government institutions on national and local levels providing support regarding use of benefits stated in adopted legislative.
4. **Acquiring modern devices** – smartphones, navigators and other technological solutions to support better mobility and orientation. Blind and partially sighted peoples' attitude towards use of modern technologies is positive. In cooperation with local companies and policy makers, all blind and visually impaired should be equipped with technological devices such as smartphones. They should also be provided with the adequate trainings on how to use devices and acquire necessary and adjusted applications regarding specific tourist offer. Tourist offers including the most important destinations as well, should be equipped with the modern technologies to support the needs of blind and visually impaired.

5. **Educating workers in the sector of tourism** in order to be informed and well acquainted on the specific needs of people with visual problems. Workers in tourism are usually not familiar with the needs of specific groups of tourists such as blind and visually impaired. It is necessary to design and conduct mandatory trainings and seminars for workers in tourism on how to serve the needs of blind and visually impaired. As per results obtained in surveys, most of respondents stated historical and cultural heritage as important element of journey organisation. In addition to that, the most important factors are adapted hotel and destination capacities as well as financial support. To be able to offer such option to blind and visually impaired, local government as well as tourist workers need to understand their specific needs and to be prepared to host them.

Suggested inputs for development of touristic route in cross border area

Given the results obtained within desk and field research including policy recommendations, in this section, it will be listed set of concrete recommendations for the purpose of organisation of the specific touristic route in cross-border area:

- 50-60 crucial touristic sights/destinations should be mapped in the targeted cross border area;
- 4-6 sights/destinations out of previously mapped sights/destinations should be selected based on specific needs and preferences of the target group considering their potential adaptability for accessible tourism;
- Travel program should be designed to satisfy the various interests of the target group – sports, cultural sightseeing, natural attractions, gastronomy, socializing events, etc. ;
- Intensity and trip duration should depend on the travel distance; In case of one-day trip the route should not take longer than 3-4 hour drive;
- As for accommodation, it does not have to be luxury but rather clean, adaptable and accessible;
- Tourist guides, as well as all other staff, should be trained to assist blind and visually impaired guests and provide them with verbal explanations, tactile activities, etc.;
- Good organization of the trip in order to minimize stress arising from unfamiliar surroundings;
- An application providing audio information about a particular sight in terms of attractions, accommodation, prices, etc.

Indicators for measuring progress in development of tourism for persons with visual impairment and blindness

1. Number of blind and visually impaired travellers

- Purpose/rational – in order to measure progress related to travel of blind and visually impaired it would be necessary to obtain data on number of travellers and their habits. Rise of blind and visually impaired travellers would be sign of better conditions for travel of targeted group. Data could be used for setting national targets and measuring direct and direct local and national benefits;
- Definition – number of registered visits and overnights spend by blind and visually impaired travellers;
- Unit of measurement – number of visits/overnights;
- Proposed data collection method – National tourist organisations and Statistical offices;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

2. Number of issued travel cards for blind and visually impaired

- Purpose/rational – travel cards could be used a new form of travel support offering broader and better systematized system of benefits. They would also serve as a tool for promotion of tourism of blind and visually impaired;
- Definition – number of issued travel cards with all travel benefits for blind and visually impaired;
- Unit of measurement – number of persons with travel card;
- Proposed data collection method – National/local associations of blind;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

3. Number of travel stations equipped with customer support for blind and visually impaired

- Purpose/rational – Customer support on travel stations in both countries are usually not recognised as important information tool for disabled persons. Better organised customer support that will include persons in charge for welcoming, transferring and providing direct information and other support would improve comfort and independence in movement;
- Definition – procedures of customer support for blind and visually impaired are defined and employees for that purpose are provided by local travel stations;
- Unit of measurement – number of travel stations with customer support for blind and visually impaired;
- Proposed data collection method – Travel stations and National/local associations of blind;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

4. Number of blind and visually impaired persons equipped with modern technological devices (smartphones, navigators, etc.)

- Purpose/rational – comfort in travelling is directly correlated with a use of modern technologies. Modern technologies ensure better organisation of travel, more information on potential destinations and better support during the visit;
- Definition – increase in using modern technologies such as navigators and smartphones are widely used by blind and visually impaired stimulating their travel activities and improving quality of journeys;
- Unit of measurement – number of smartphones/navigators per 100 blind and visually impaired;
- Proposed data collection method – National/local associations of blind;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

5. Number of hotels/tourist capacities/destinations equipped with necessary equipment, sound and tactile signalisation for blind and visually impaired

- Purpose/rational – hotels as well as tourist destinations and points should be well equipped in order to ensure independent movement and use of their capacities without discrimination. Blind and visually impaired should be informed on all existing tourist potentials offering the best possible service with regard to satisfaction of their needs;
- Definition – increasing number of hotels with all necessary equipment to serve blind and visually impaired tourists;
- Unit of measurement – number of hotels/tourist points/routes equipped for blind and visually impaired;
- Proposed data collection method – National/local associations of blind, national tourist organisations;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

6. Number of tourist workers trained for hosting blind and visually impaired guests

- Purpose/rational – tourism employees should be trained on travel needs and habits of blind and visually impaired. Their ability to host blind will influence attractiveness of particular destination which also has indirect impact not only on local development but to equal treatment of all types of tourists;
- Definition – tourism workers are well trained to host blind and visually impaired tourists. They are continually improving their capacities ensuring benefits for both tourist destinations and tourists;
- Unit of measurement – number of local tourism workers trained and number of trainings held;
- Proposed data collection method – local/national tourism workers;
- Frequency of data collection – annually.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The overall objective of this research was to create preconditions for developing tourism i.e. enhancing the joint tourism offer in the targeted cross-border area of West Backa District in Serbia and Osijek-Baranja County in Croatia by expanding it to visually impaired and blind persons.

In order to accomplish the goals of the project, a research was conducted in both Serbia and Croatia. The research was aimed at perceiving the specific travelling needs, interests and preferences, as well as previous experiences of both people with visual impairments and blindness and their companions. Also, for the purpose of getting a wider perspective and better understanding of the matter, institutional and regulatory framework was analysed in both countries.

The methodology used in the research included desk research of relevant documents, in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with officials and members of associations of blind and visually impaired persons in twenty towns (ten in Croatia and ten in Serbia), as well as survey of family members, friends and professionals accompanying persons on touristic travelling in the same twenty towns.

The research results and the analysis of institutional and regulatory framework are embodied in the Action plan along with SWOT analysis of tourist potentials in the cross border area and policy recommendations.

The Action plan developed methodology, identified policy applicable research findings and proposed recommendations for creating and improving tourism offer for the blind and visually impaired in the targeted cross-border area.

Valuable inputs for the research as a whole and more precisely for the suggested recommendations were provided from the study visits in Croatia, Italy and Serbia. A set of specific policy recommendations resulted from the conducted desk and field research, is additionally complemented by proposed indicators for measuring the progress in the development of tourism for blind and visually impaired. Finally, the Action plan suggests inputs for development of joint touristic route in cross border area which particularly emphasizes all key findings of the entire project research.

This document can be considered as a useful basis for creating future action plans and policy papers, as well as for mapping tourist offers for other vulnerable groups. Also, it is an important evidence based input for sustainable policy in the field of accessible tourism with a particular focus on blind and visually impaired persons.

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