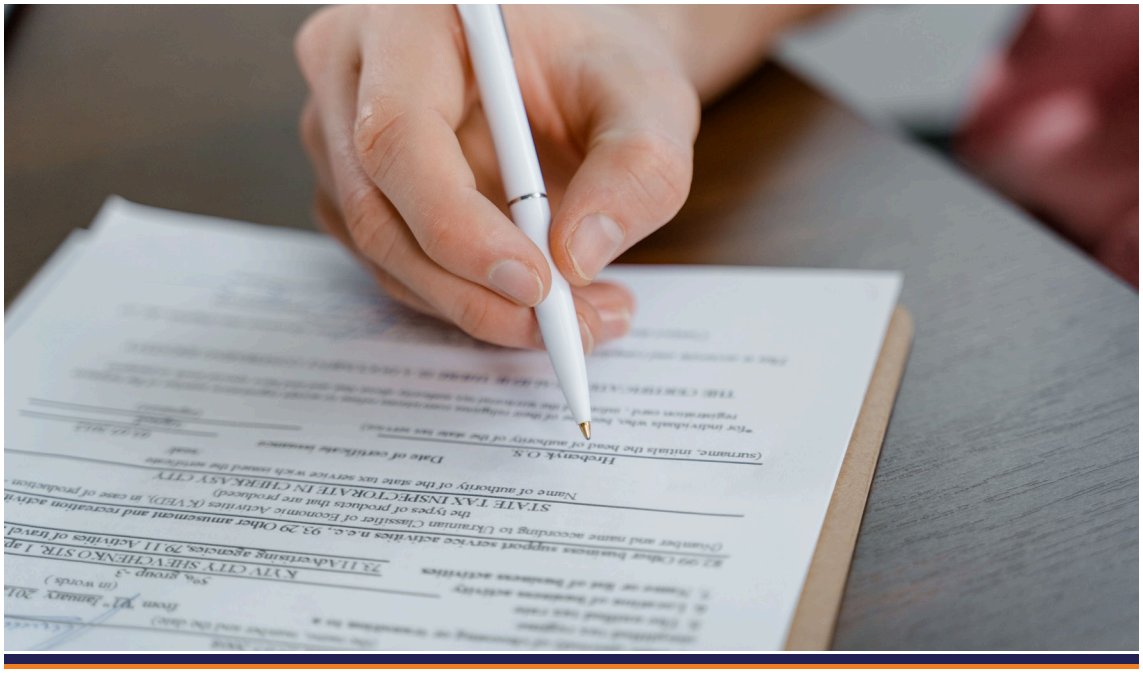
WeBER III
WESTERN BALKAN ENABLERS FOR REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

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Users Have Their Say:

The Experience of Citizens in Four Serbian Cities with Service Delivery

Citizens' experience in direct interaction with public authorities is an important, if not crucial, indicator of the quality of service delivery, particularly at the level of cities and municipalities, where most administrative procedures are carried out. The speed of processing, clarity of procedures, availability of information and the way service-delivery staff communicate all affect how efficiently citizens can exercise their rights and, consequently, their perception of how well the administration functions.

Within Serbia's public administration reform (PAR),[1] whose steps are set out in the PAR strategic framework, improving the user experience, i.e., making the administration user-oriented, has been recognised as a key course of action, particularly in modernising and digitalising services and strengthening service-delivery capacity. While the strategic framework and implementation reports provide insight into plans and the degree of implementation, monitoring citizens' experiences offers a unique snapshot of the actual state of service delivery in practice.

1 Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2030, Official Gazette RS, no. 42/2021, 9/2022, available at: https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2021/42/1/reg, and eGovernment Development Programme in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2023-2025 with Action Plan for its implementation, Official Gazette RS, no. 33/2023, available at: https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/drugiakt/2023/33/1/reg. At the time of writing, no Programme had been adopted for the period after 2025.

Accordingly, any service delivery policy aimed at satisfied users must be based primarily on their experiences, using them as empirical parameters for managing further reforms.

The results of the exit polling of citizens in four Serbian cities - Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Novi Sad and Belgrade - show that the overall experience of service delivery is predominantly positive. A lower level of satisfaction with individual parts of the service delivery process points to the need to collect not only general but also specific feedback from users who have requested a service more than once. The results also indicate the need to adapt communication to different user groups, particularly regarding the possibility of completing services, or parts of services, online and the accessibility measures applied for vulnerable groups, since surveyed citizens have certain doubts or uncertainties on these issues.

Any service delivery policy aimed at satisfied users must be based primarily on their experiences, using them as empirical parameters for managing further reforms.

The citizen exit polling was conducted between March and August 2025 as part of activities carried out by civil society organisations awarded grants under the WeBER 3.0 Small Grants Facility.[2] Its purpose was to provide analytical insight into how citizens experience service delivery immediately after interacting with public authorities.[3] According to respondents, the services most frequently requested during the survey fell into the following areas: personal documents (such as identity cards, passports and driving licences), healthcare services (such as applications for health insurance cards and appointment booking), and the issuance of various certificates and attestations (such as citizenship certificates, residence certificates and civil registry extracts).

The survey findings presented below make it possible to identify patterns in user experiences and differences between cities and provide a basis for proposing further improvements in this area.

User experience indicates predominantly positive impressions of service delivery

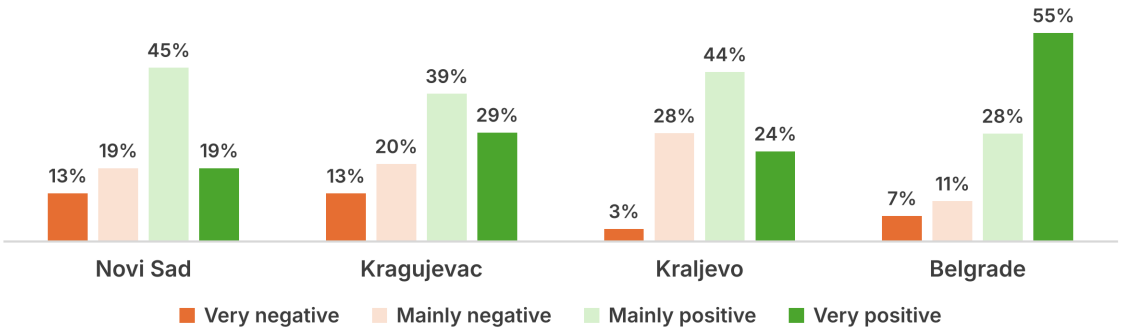
The survey findings point to a predominantly positive overall experience among citizens obtaining public services in all four cities. On average, more than two thirds of respondents rated their experience as very or mostly positive (72%), suggesting a relatively stable level of satisfaction. Belgrade stands out, with an absolute majority reporting a very positive experience (55%) and the total share of positive experiences reaching 83% (Chart 1). Respondents could not choose “don’t know” or express no view on overall satisfaction, which effectively required

2 More information about WeBER Small Grant Facility in Serbia, and in the Western Balkan region, is available at: https://www.par-monitor.org/grantees/.

3 In common usage, exit polling is a method of predicting election results by surveying voters as they leave the polling station. In the context of this brief, an exit survey is a method of gathering citizens’ experiences regarding their level of satisfaction, waiting times, staff courtesy and other aspects of service delivery immediately after they leave the premises of the administrative authority that provided the service.

them to indicate the direction in which their experience leaned even if they had no clearly formed opinion. Overall, the broadly positive sentiment suggests relatively standardised service delivery procedures, irrespective of the user's location.

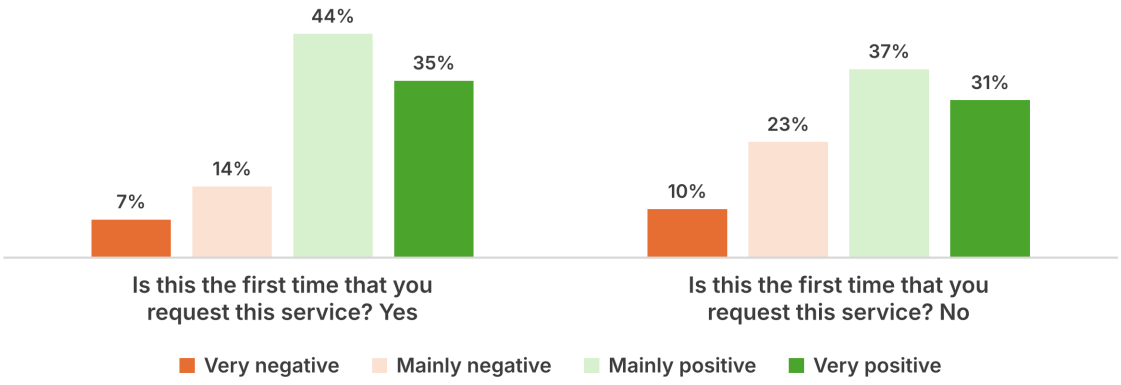
Chart 1: How would you describe your experience? (per city, without possibility for "don't know" answer)



However, citizens using a service for the first time are noticeably more likely to report positive experiences than those who have used the same service before. In other words, new users report higher positive responses by 11 percentage points than old users (79% compared with 68%; Chart 2). The differences are not negligible: among respondents who had previously requested the service, one third held a very or mostly negative view. This highlights the importance of accumulated experience in shaping attitudes, making prior experience, or its absence, an important factor in assessing the work of the administration.

For example, new users may report higher satisfaction because they have fewer expectations, while lower satisfaction among old users may stem from their most recent attempt, when an individual aspect of the procedure fell below expectations owing, for instance, to unsatisfactory communication, cooperation or courtesy on the part of officials. Whatever the reasons for the difference between old and new users, it can also be interpreted as a need for public authorities to collect targeted feedback from users with accumulated experience, since procedures and methods of service delivery may change over time, as may users' needs and habits.

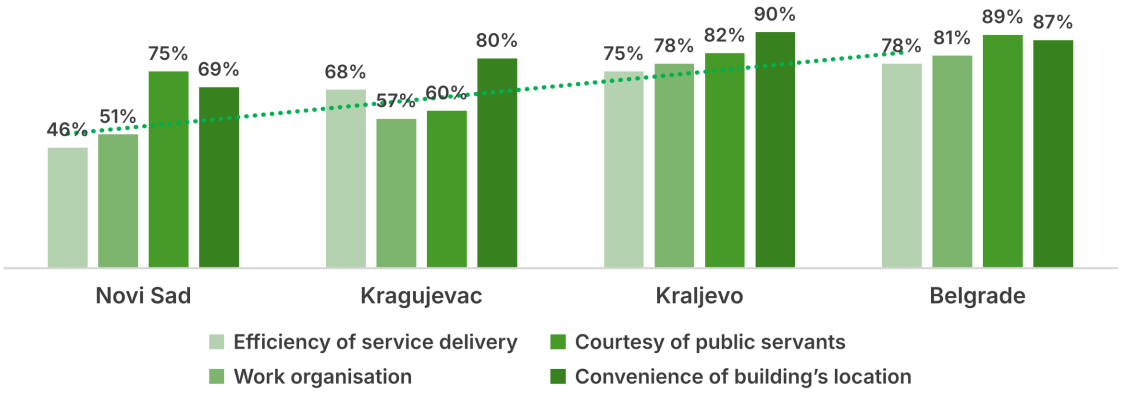
Chart 2: How would you describe your experience? (comparatively with responses on previous experience)



Differences emerge in perceptions of individual aspects of service delivery

When assessing individual aspects of the service received, such as efficiency, staff courtesy, organisation of work and the convenience of the building's location, surveyed citizens once again reported a high degree of satisfaction. Kraljevo and Belgrade stand out in particular, with satisfaction for each aspect ranging from 75% to as high as 90% (the combined "very satisfactory" and "mostly satisfactory" responses; Chart 3). Overall satisfaction among residents of Kragujevac was somewhat lower, while the only instance of majority dissatisfaction was recorded in Novi Sad, concerning the speed of service delivery (46% satisfied overall). Novi Sad also recorded lower average satisfaction across all the other aspects listed. Thus, although the generally positive attitudes noted above are largely repeated, user experience clearly varies locally, indicating that local contextual factors affect satisfaction and should, where possible, be considered when assessing service delivery performance.

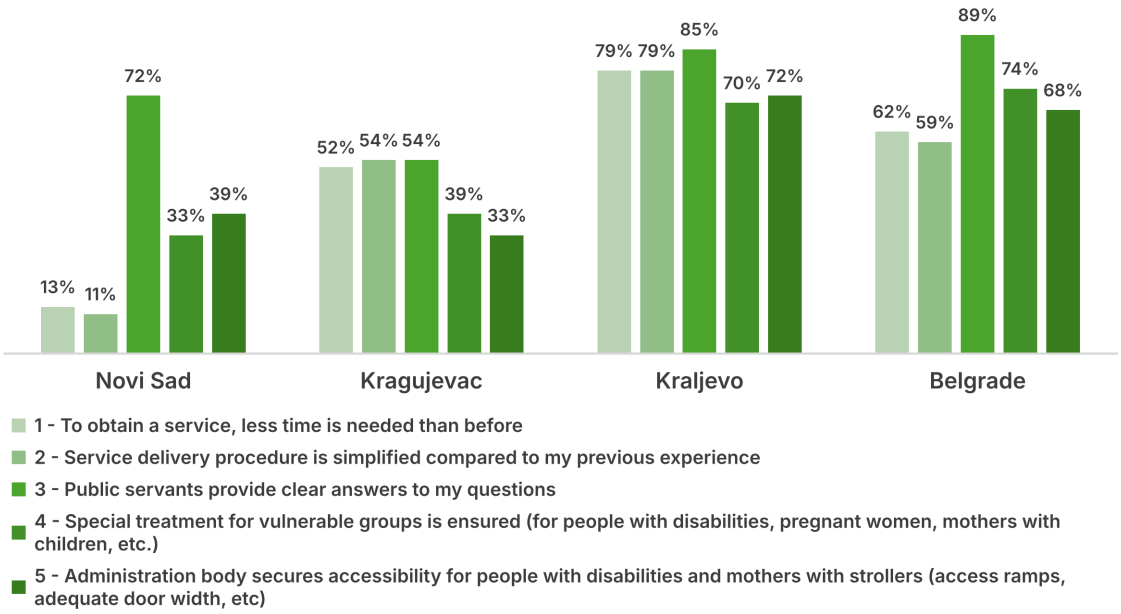
Chart 3: How satisfied are you with individual aspects of service delivery? (per city, positive responses – "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied")



On the other hand, when citizens were asked about similar individual aspects of service delivery by indicating agreement with predefined statements, with "don't know" available as a response, affirmative answers declined. Two groups of cities can be clearly distinguished: Kragujevac and Novi Sad, where views were sharply divided or even predominantly negative in Novi Sad; and Kraljevo and Belgrade, where positive attitudes continued to prevail. The examples of Kragujevac and Novi Sad suggest that the broadly positive views on service experience noted above should be treated with caution and supplemented by further analysis. Chart 4 below summarises positive responses to five statements on the efficiency and simplicity of procedures, staff courtesy and two aspects of accessibility.

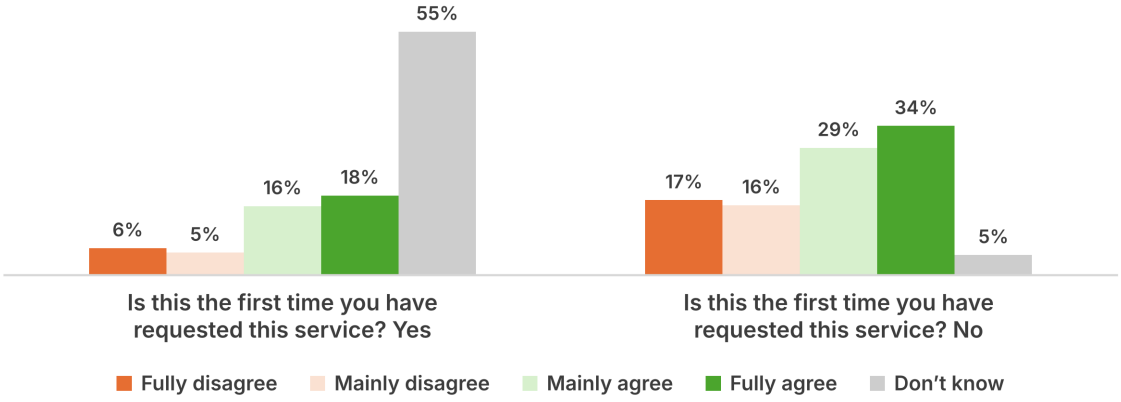
In this connection, respondents' lack of a clear view deserves attention. On the efficiency of the service obtaining procedure, for example, "don't know" responses accounted for around one quarter of respondents on average, across all cities (23%); in Novi Sad the share was considerably higher (46%). However, cross-referencing this statement with answers to the question *Is this the first time you have requested this service?* leads to the logical conclusion that an absolute majority of first-time users do not know whether less time is required than before (55%; Chart 5). Since a substantive answer on procedural efficiency depends

Chart 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements (per city, positive responses "mostly" and "fully agree")



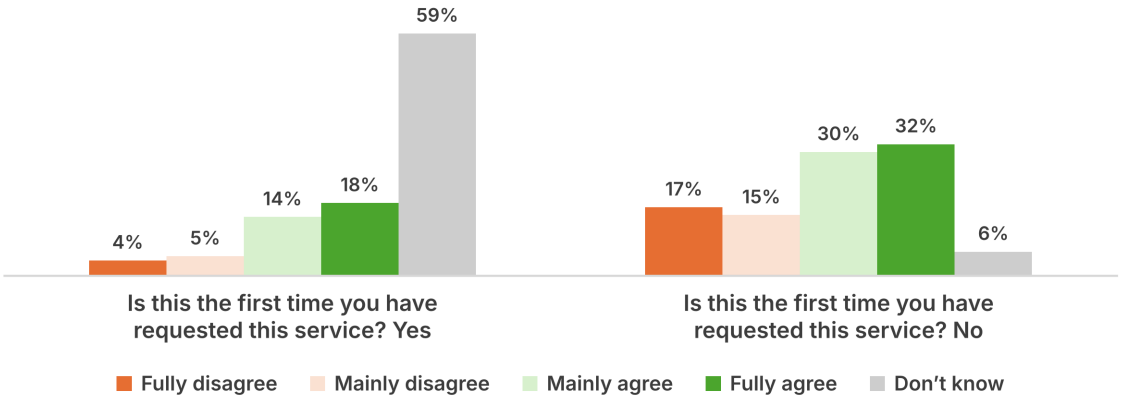
primarily on previous experience with the same service, respondents do not appear to have drawn on other personal interactions with national or local public authorities.

Chart 5: For getting a service, less time is needed than before (comparatively with responses on previous experience)



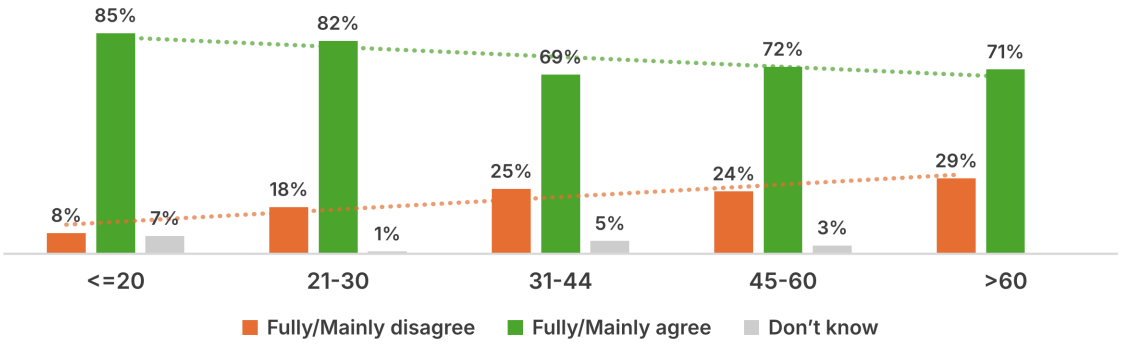
The same pattern is evident for the statement about simplifying the procedure for obtaining a service. Overall, one quarter of respondents did not know whether this was the case (25%); by city, this view was again most pronounced in Novi Sad (47%). A majority of respondents requesting a particular service for the first time chose "don't know" (59%), whereas this response was almost negligible among those who had requested the same service previously (Chart 6). As noted above, tailored feedback collection that differentiates users according to prior experience therefore emerges as a useful means of improving individual parts of the procedure.

Chart 6: Procedure for obtaining a service is simplified compared to my previous experience (comparatively with responses on previous experience)



Responses to the statement that officials provide clear answers reveal certain differences by age group, while the proportion answering "don't know" was substantially lower on average, irrespective of previous experience with the service (3% on average). Although attitudes were predominantly positive across age groups, disagreement increased with respondents' age, reaching 29% in the oldest category (Chart 7). This finding indicates that communication approaches need to be continuously defined and applied according to users' socio-demographic characteristics to reduce the potential risk of unintended systemic discrimination.

Chart 7: Public servants provide clear answers to my questions (per age category)



Regarding the prevention of discrimination against service users, more than one third of all respondents neither confirmed nor denied the existence of special treatment for vulnerable groups[4] (36% answered "don't know"). By city, the share ranged from 19% in Kraljevo to 59% in Novi Sad. Although an absolute majority of both women and men agreed that such treatment was provided, 55% and 52% respectively mostly or fully agreed, "don't know" was the response most often selected by both groups (Chart 8). The same pattern was recorded for the physical accessibility of public authorities for persons with disabilities and mothers with children. On average, 32% did not know, including 53% in Novi Sad and 47% in Kragujevac; once again, this was the most frequently selected response among both women and men (Chart 9). The prevalence of uncertainty may reflect the

4 For example, people with disabilities, mother with children, and pregnant women.

fact that many respondents do not belong to the vulnerable groups defined in this way. Even so, insufficiently clear communication and poor visibility of accessibility mechanisms may make it difficult to form a definite view. In any event, establishing and continuously monitoring measures to ensure appropriate treatment and physical accessibility for different population groups is an indispensable part of citizen-centred service delivery reform and must receive particular attention.

Chart 8: Special treatment is ensured for vulnerable groups (per sex)

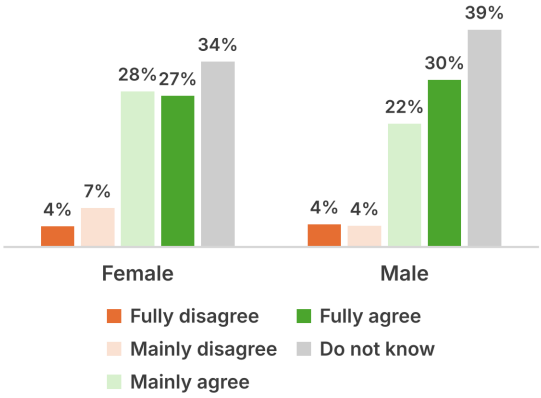
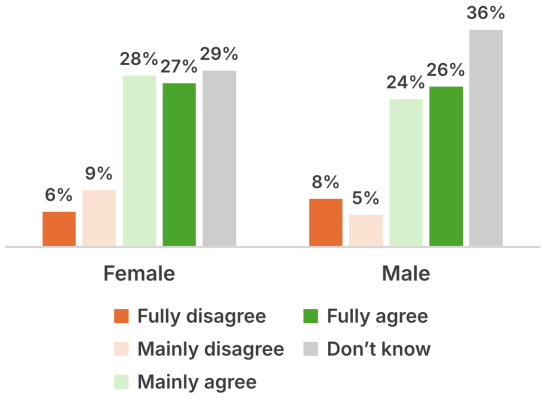


Chart 9: Administration body ensures accessibility for people with disabilities and mothers with children in strollers (per sex)



(Mis)understanding online services and satisfaction with eGovernment

Citizens' experiences concerning the possibility of completing a particular service online show a significant shift. Across all four cities, an average of 60% of respondents said they had not had this option, while only 27% believed that they had. Kraljevo was the only city where a majority (61%) reported being able to complete a service online; the corresponding share in the other three cities was modest, falling to just 7% in Novi Sad (Chart 10). Differences by age group also reveal an experience gap between the youngest respondents and everyone else: a majority of the youngest respondents reported experience of obtaining a service online (57%), although a substantial 35% in the same group reported the opposite. Stable majorities in all other age groups denied having such experience, ranging from 58% to 69% (Chart 11). This suggests that, irrespective of age apart from the youngest group, citizens either still do not recognise or genuinely do not have the opportunity to complete the full process by initiating a request and completing the entire procedure electronically. The experience of citizens in Kraljevo is therefore an interesting exception that merits a separate analysis of the local context.

By contrast, respondents' views were more positive regarding the possibility of completing at least one part of a service online. On average, 50% believed that they had managed to complete part of the service online. Only residents of Novi Sad mostly denied having even this opportunity, while almost two thirds of respondents in Belgrade and Kraljevo confirmed it (Chart 12). A shift is also visible across age groups: respondents of different ages generally confirmed completing one part of a service electronically, although with a clear downward trend as age increased (Chart 13).

Chart 10: Did you have an opportunity to complete this service online (per city)?

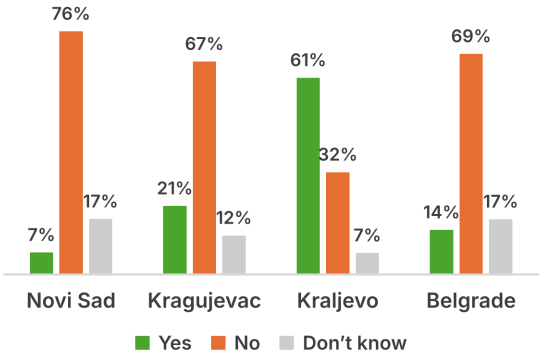


Chart 11: Did you have an opportunity to complete this service online (per age category)?

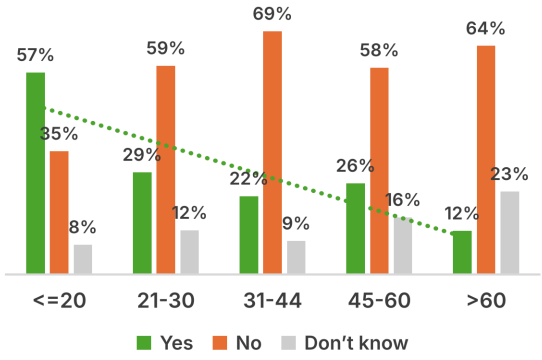


Chart 12: Did you have an opportunity to complete any segment of the service online (per city)?

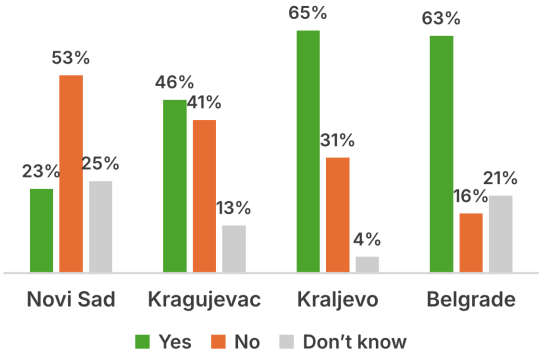
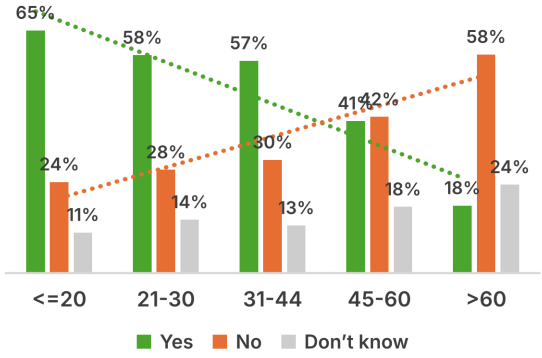


Chart 13: Did you have an opportunity to complete any segment of the service online (per age category)?

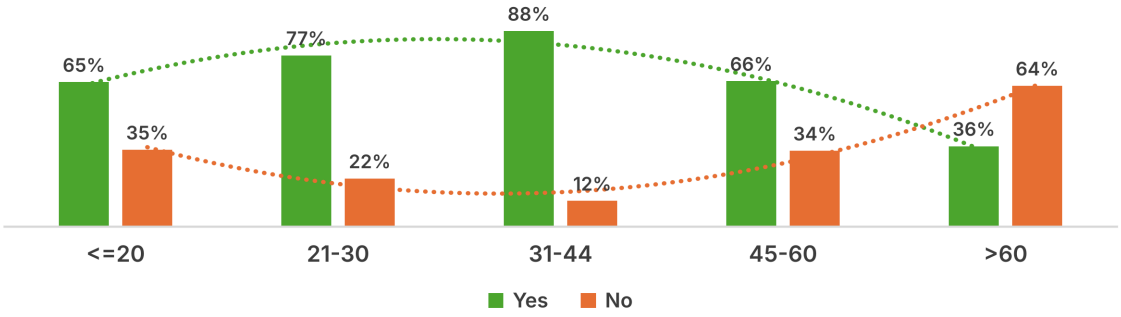


Answers on which part of the procedure respondents successfully completed online further illustrate their experience. The most frequently completed online stages included booking appointments for personal documents and medical examinations, paying fees and charges, submitting various applications online, and enrolment in pre-school, secondary and higher education institutions. Some respondents also stated that every service delivery stage was completed online, which may indicate that some citizens are insufficiently informed about what constitutes a complete service-delivery cycle. On the other hand, since some services in Serbia cannot, by their nature, be completed fully online - for example, replacing an old identity card requires at least one visit to the competent police authority - individual service delivery stages may be regarded as services in their own right in the online environment. In that example, the service would be booking an appointment to replace the identity card, which is how the option is presented on the eGovernment Portal. More generally, both the way competent authorities inform citizens and the way citizens interpret e-government options can shape personal views of online experience with services. Alongside the expansion of e-government in Serbia and the growing range of digital services, a clear communication strategy tailored to different user groups is therefore needed.

In this connection, surveyed citizens predominantly confirmed using the eGovernment Portal. On average, 73% reported having used it, with at least two thirds

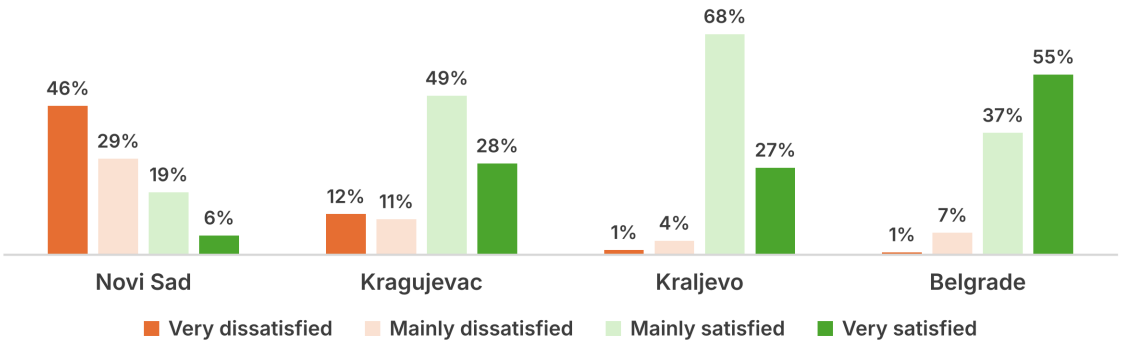
doing so in every city, ranging from 68% in Belgrade to 78% in Kragujevac. Experience by age group was unsurprising: the oldest respondents had the least experience with the eGovernment Portal (36%), while those aged 31-44 had the most (Chart 14).

Chart 14: Did you use so far eGovernment services (per age category)?



Respondents also expressed a high level of satisfaction with eGovernment services, with an average of 75% being very or mainly satisfied. Belgrade stood out with 55% very satisfied, while cumulative satisfaction in Kraljevo reached 95% (Chart 15). By contrast, citizens of Novi Sad not only reported the lowest satisfaction but were the only group in which dissatisfaction predominated. Despite this difference, and despite the clear majority view that services could not be completed online (see Chart 10 above), respondents across the four cities held a predominantly positive view of e-government in Serbia and of the eGovernment Portal as a means of interacting with public authorities. "Mainly satisfied" responses predominated, showing considerable scope for improvement particularly through examining user experience and applying user-oriented methods when developing new procedures or revising existing ones (*human-centred design*). These attitudes confirm some progress in the service delivery reform but also create an additional obligation: improving quality standards and developing services in line with users' expectations and needs are essential to sustaining positive citizen experience and reducing disparities by geography, age or other criteria.

Chart 15: How satisfied are you with the eGovernment services (per city)?



How citizens see opportunities to improve public administration and service delivery

Service delivery is one of the most tangible indicators of how public authorities perform, since users' interactions with them shape impressions of how efficient, impartial and accessible the administration is, and whether it ultimately makes it easier or harder for citizens to navigate life events that require administrative support. Service delivery practice also provides the clearest reflection of public administration reform performance: from the public's perspective, reforms at legislative, organisational, procedural or other levels are meaningful only if they produce a concrete outcome. Put simply, that outcome is the ease with which citizens can pursue legitimate requests and interests in their interactions with administrative authorities.

Judging by the experience of surveyed citizens in four Serbian cities, interaction with public authorities in service delivery is, overall, moderately to predominantly positive. Differences between cities, especially the views recorded in Novi Sad, but also certain findings elsewhere, nevertheless call for caution, as they may suggest inconsistencies in access depending on location. Ideally, service delivery policy and practice should strive for equal access for all through clear, universal standards and by eliminating differences in experience caused by action or inaction on the part of public authorities.

The experiences presented in this brief also indicate that use of, and satisfaction with, the eGovernment Portal are at a solid level, and that the portal is recognised as a single online administrative point through which citizens can complete certain tasks, individual stages or even an entire service. Nevertheless, survey data also reveal uncertainty about some traditional aspects of service delivery, particularly accessibility for vulnerable groups. The high proportion of citizens who did not know whether adequate accessibility arrangements were in place is a reminder that service delivery policy is not merely an online offer, but a comprehensive system that should treat the digital environment and face-to-face services with equal care.

Finally, in summarising their most recent interaction with public authorities, surveyed citizens offered proposals for improving administrative work and service delivery practice. These included organisational and operational measures, such as better internal organisation and coordination, and further efforts to simplify and automate procedures. Respondents also proposed strengthening internal capacity, both in staffing levels and expertise. On accessibility, they suggested transport for older persons and persons with disabilities when an in-person visit is required. In the digital sphere, alongside expanding the range of electronic services, respondents identified infrastructure and other improvements to enhance user experience, including better management of available services and appointments and linking databases held by several public authorities. Finally, simpler and clearer communication with citizens was recognised as a priority underpinning a user-oriented public service delivery system.

Despite the broadly positive experiences presented in this brief, citizens' proposals show that it is not enough to rely solely on a general approach to service delivery or generic communication with users; continuous adaptation to their needs is a reality. Where these needs concern greater digital or physical accessibility and appropriate treatment in communication and interaction with vulnerable

groups, responsiveness to users becomes not only a guiding principle but also a criterion for the success of service delivery policy.

Improving and developing service delivery has been a key priority of public administration reform in Serbia for more than a decade, and measurable results have been achieved, as confirmed not only by authoritative international sources, including the EU and OECD/SIGMA, but also by civil society through the regional WeBER initiative. The predominantly positive messages from respondents are therefore unsurprising. Nevertheless, dissatisfaction among a minority of users clearly calls for further, more detailed examination of experiences and identification of the specific situations, services or population groups in which experiences are more negative, so that they can receive particular attention in future service improvements. In light of these views and other challenges identified through the survey, service providers are recommended to:

1. **Establish regular, targeted collection of user feedback by stage of the service delivery procedure and according to prior experience.** Regular feedback collection should distinguish first-time users from those who have used the service before. In addition to overall satisfaction, experience of individual stages should be measured, since new users reported positive responses 11 percentage points more often than previous users (79% compared with 68%). Kragujevac and Novi Sad also show that broadly positive ratings may conceal divided or negative views on specific aspects. This approach would help identify the situations, services and user groups whose experience is poorer.

2. **Adapt officials' communication to the needs of different age groups.** This should include training in clear and simple communication, written guidance understandable to a wide range of users, and direct assistance with electronic services. The findings show a growing need for clearer, tailored communication as age increases; the oldest respondents also had the least experience of the eGovernment Portal (36%). A targeted approach reduces the risk of unintended systemic discrimination against older users both in person and in the transition to electronic channels.

3. **Establish, clearly communicate, and continuously monitor measures for tailored treatment and physical accessibility for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, mothers with children and pregnant women.** This includes making such measures visible at service locations and online and periodically checking their implementation. Around one third of respondents could neither confirm nor deny the existence of special treatment measures (36%) or physical accessibility measures (32%). Although this may partly reflect the fact that respondents do not belong to vulnerable groups, poor visibility can hinder assessment of their effectiveness. Consideration should also be given to citizens' proposal to organise transport for older persons and persons with disabilities where an in-person visit is essential.

4. **Alongside expanding the range of services, develop a clear communication strategy for electronic services.** For each service, communication should specify which steps can be completed online, which require an in-person visit and what constitutes the full service delivery cycle. On average, 60% of respondents reported that they could not complete a service online, while half confirmed completing at least one stage online. Some said they had completed the entire service electronically even where this was impossible by the nature of the procedure. This indicates insufficient understanding of the

scope of digital services and different interpretations of eGovernment options such as appointment booking.

5. **Improve service delivery through user-centred approaches.** Further improvement and simplification of both digital and face-to-face services should be based on systematic examination of experience and empathy with users, applying human-centred design methods.

Authorities responsible for designing and coordinating service delivery policy and developing e-government are recommended to:

1. **Analyse differences in user experience and establish clear, universal quality standards so that the place of service delivery does not affect citizens' experience.** Novi Sad was the only city with majority dissatisfaction on any service delivery aspect, with 46% of satisfied respondents with the speed of service provision, and it also recorded the lowest satisfaction with eGovernment services. By contrast, Kraljevo stood out positively: 61% said they could complete the service online, and eGovernment satisfaction reached 95%. This divergence merits a dedicated analysis of the local context to determine whether transferable good practices are involved or whether local, contextual barriers affect quality standards for the same services in different settings.

Methodological annex

Civil society organisations in Serbia conducted the exit polls between March and August 2025 in four cities: Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Belgrade. Across the four cities, 830 survey responses were processed. The survey was conducted in person using a standardised questionnaire available on the website of the WeBER citizen campaign *Monitor (Y)our reform*.[5]

Table 1: Basic information

Survey period	March–August 2025
Cities	Kraljevo, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Belgrade
Total respondents	830
Sex	41% male, 58% female, 0.2% other
Age categories	≤20, 21–30, 31–44, 45–60, >60

Chart 16: Respondents' structure per sex

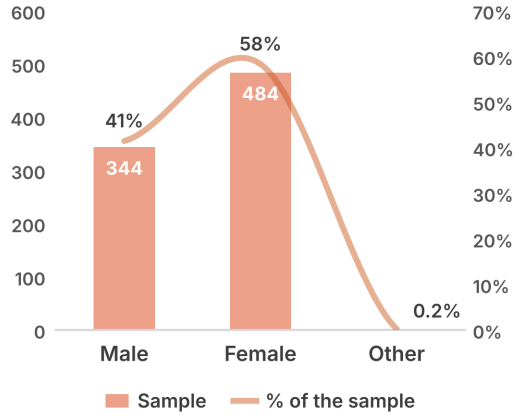
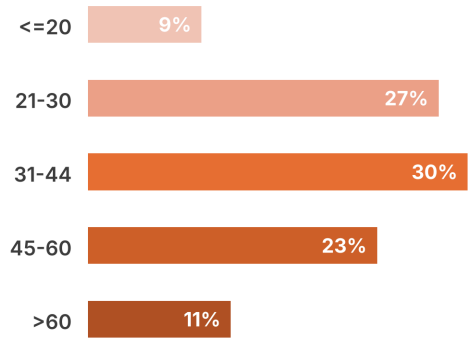


Chart 17: Respondents' structure per age (years)



Of all respondents, just over one third said they were requesting the particular service for the first time (36%), while almost two thirds had previous experience (64%). The chart below shows the distribution across different service areas.

Chart 18: Is this the first time that you request this service?

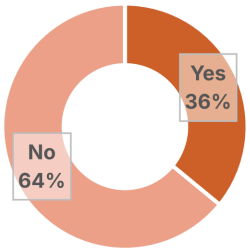
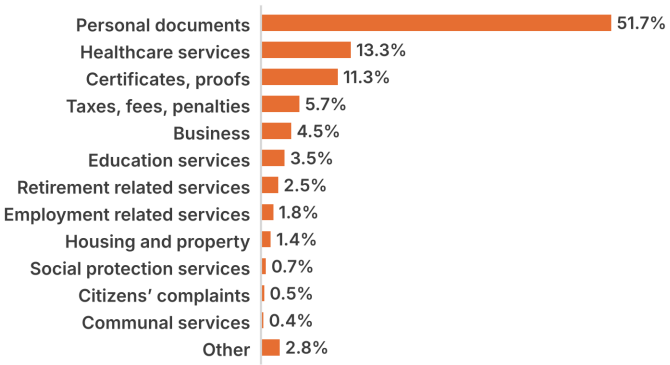


Chart 19: Areas of services



5 Available at: https://pratimoreformu.rs.

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