



**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**  
KNJIGA APSTRAKATA

**Fifth International Conference**  
Peta međunarodna konferencija

**Why Still Education?**

**Čemu još obrazovanje?**

**EDUCATION**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**RESISTANCE**  
**OBRAZOVANJE**  
**ZAJEDNICA**  
**OTPOR**

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# Contents / Sadržaj

|                                                                                                    |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Program and Organising Committees</b><br>Programski i organizacioni odbor                       | <b>04</b> |
| <b>Why Still Education? 5 (Conference Vision)</b><br>Čemu još obrazovanje? 5 (vizija konferencije) | <b>06</b> |
| <b>Conference Program</b><br>Program konferencije                                                  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Keynote Speakers</b><br>Uvodni izlagači                                                         | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Paper Abstracts</b><br>Rezimei izlaganja                                                        | <b>18</b> |



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## Challenges of Intercultural Integration and Academic Adjustment among International Medical Students in Serbian Higher Education

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital, this paper examines the academic and sociocultural challenges faced by international medical students in Serbian higher education and the structural conditions shaping their integration and sense of community. In recent decades the Government of the RS has shown a growing interest in attracting IS through initiatives such as "World in Serbia" and "Serbia for Serbs from the Region." Despite this commitment, research examining the lived experiences of these students and how those experiences relate to their integration and sense of belonging remains limited. Given that existing studies indicate the largest proportion of IS in Serbia are enrolled in medical faculties, this paper focuses on that population. A bilingual online questionnaire was developed and data were collected between October 2025 and April 2026. A total of 135 responses were obtained from scholarship holders and self-funded students at all levels of study. Eligibility criteria required at least one year of study in Serbia. The findings reveal that academic challenges within an unfamiliar educational system, combined with adaptation to a new social environment, significantly shape students' overall experiences. Barriers to integration are most consistently associated with language, manifesting in academic contexts such as lectures, examinations, and institutional communication, as well as in everyday social interactions outside the university. Beyond language, the data suggest that sociocultural isolation frequently accompanies the integration process, particularly in domains of life beyond formal academic participation. The results underscore the responsibility of higher education institutions and policymakers to better understand and actively address the needs of international students, developing targeted strategies that foster genuine inclusion within academic settings and across the broader social communities in which these students live.