



Regional Cooperation Council



# Western Balkans SecuriMeter

*Security Public Opinion Survey  
(#SecuriMeter) 2021:*

## **Attitudes towards security:**

Perceptions of security and threats  
in Western Balkans

good.  
better.  
regional.

Title: Security Public Opinion Survey (#SecuriMeter) 2021:  
"Attitudes towards security: Perceptions of security and threats in  
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# Security Public Opinion Survey (#SecuriMeter) 2021: "Attitudes towards security: Perceptions of security and threats in Western Balkans"

1ST SPECIAL EDITION OF THE BALKAN BAROMETER SURVEY  
PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY - ANALYTICAL REPORT

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and International Cooperation

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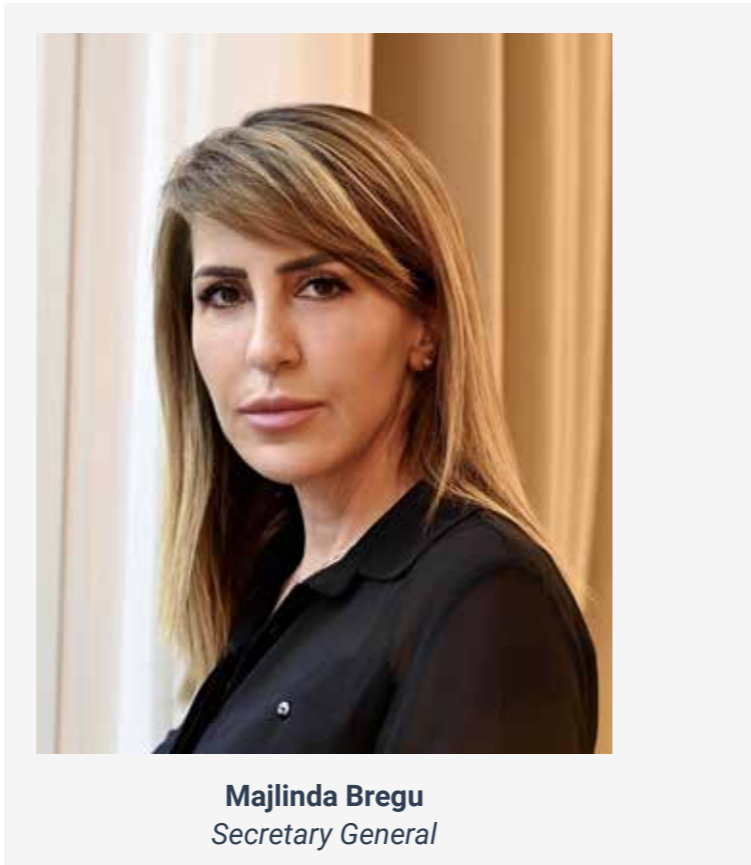
# FOREWORD

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 1<sup>st</sup> Special edition of the Security Barometer Survey (#SecuriMeter), which explores the most important contemporary regional security issues facing Western Balkans today and public perceptions towards them.

Security has increasingly become a priority both for the region and its partners. Benefits for the region, its citizens and the EU hinge on making security the cornerstone of our investments through political decisions, dialogue, and developing regional friendships.

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has become an organisation that has grown in its scope, in parallel with the raising awareness that EU-modelled socio-economic reforms and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans require a comprehensive, holistic approach. Security has emerged as an indispensable element in this context. RCC has hence undertaken actions to provide a political umbrella to different regional security organisations active in the field. Subsequently, RCC has become the host to the Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG)<sup>1</sup> and transformed the so-called Jumbo Security Conference into an annual security platform for policymakers and practitioners, aimed at streamlining security policies and activities in South East Europe.

In order to keep track of Western Balkans public and business sentiments across a range of socio-economic aspects, RCC has been conducting opinion surveys and analyses, known as the Balkan Barometer (BB). Running annually since 2015, BB has allowed the RCC and policymakers to take informed actions and shape appropriate responses. As the role of the RCC in the security sector has significantly increased in the last couple of years, it became



evident that a separate, focused survey of contemporary regional security issues and perceptions towards them was timely and important for improved assessment and response in the Western Balkans region.

In this respect, RCC designed and undertook the data collection process during December 2020 and January 2021, as a prerequisite for the development of the first-ever regional Security Public Opinion Survey (#SecuriMeter) 2021: "Attitudes towards security: Perceptions of security and threats in Western Balkans". The added value of this particular survey lies in the fact that it was conducted in coordination with and full participation of the regionally-owned organisations: MARRI, UNDP/SEESAC,

DPPI-SEE and the IISG as a standalone project within the RCC.

The 2021 Special security edition represents the next chapter in the steady evolution of the region's foremost survey of public opinion. The 1<sup>st</sup> Special edition of the Security Barometer Survey or SecuriMeter consists of an analytical report of citizens' opinions of Western Balkans Six. The survey was conducted in all six economies participating in the implementation of IISG processes, i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia.

I am certain of the relevance and timeliness of the Security Balkan Barometer - SecuriMeter for policymakers and security practitioners, but also for the general public, all of whom may benefit from reliable statistics on regional

security trends and perceptions. Like previous editions of Balkan Barometer, this 1<sup>st</sup> Security Edition is likewise anticipated to become a valuable resource in developing fact-based policies and observing their effects on the region and on individual economies – all with the unique goal of promoting peace and security in the region.

I hope you will all enjoy reading the below elaborated data and make use of its findings.

**Majlinda Bregu**  
*Secretary General*  
Regional Cooperation Council

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

# INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalised world. As boundaries grow blurred and the Globe grows ever more interconnected and interdependent, so too do security issues in one economy easily become reflected throughout the region.

Over the recent years, new and evolving challenges have brought security to the forefront of the public and policy-makers concerns across the Western Balkans region, as well as within the EU. Not least, the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic showcased in most dramatic of terms the vulnerability of our systems to external shocks, as well as the benefits of joint coordination and solidarity in responding to threats. This experience, however, may be observed across the security sector. The World and security threats are changing fast, and resilience greatly depends on our ability to respond timely, adequately and with joined forces.

With that in mind, RCC decided to launch comprehensive survey/research to try to contribute to the contents of a public space that visibly lacks relevant data and interpretations of regional and individual security challenges or their reflection on the region in which we live.

The first-ever regional Security Public Opinion Survey is a venture of the RCC and Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) teams, in cooperation with partners: UNDP/South East and Eastern European Clearinghouse for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Initiative (DPPI-SEE) and Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). It represents an attempt to elaborate on the state of play of the rapidly changing regional security landscape.

The goal was to portray attitudes towards current security challenges and trends in the Western Balkans, both at the regional and individual level, helping to inform the work of policymakers and other interested regional stakeholders, and provide better understanding of and improving the overall regional security.

The Security Barometer 2021 (#SecuriMeter) posed 47 questions to 6046 citizens from the entire Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia), with findings presented in the report – "Attitudes towards security: Perceptions of security and threats in Western Balkans".

The content of the 2021 Security Barometer issue reflects the intertwining of regional and domestic, Western Balkans reality.

The research included the following chapters:

- A.** General security perception
- B.** Perceptions of the fight against terrorism, organised crime, and border security
  - ♦ Border security
  - ♦ Terrorism
  - ♦ Organised crime
- C.** Perceptions of gun ownership and fighting illicit possession, trafficking and misuse of SALW
- D.** Perceptions of illegal immigration, asylum seeking and humanitarian dimension of migratory movements which can help measure sentiments of people but also responsiveness of institutions

**E.** Perceptions of disaster prevention and disaster preparedness

**F.** Hybrid threats and disinformation as a new security challenge

The Security Barometer Report is only a starting point and does not contain all the details regarding the issues it deals with. It cannot be complete without the study and action of all relevant and interested stakeholders. We hope the Report will inspire you to engage in shaping security in your economy and region and encourage others to do the same.

## KEY FINDINGS

**The Balkan Public Security Sentiment Index (BPSSI) has been observed to be more positive than negative.** It is not unusual that expectations are more optimistic than the assessment of the current state of affairs. However, there is no bigger discrepancy between the expectations and the perceptions of present situation, with the BPSSI – present situation index standing at 54.50 and BPSSI – expectation index at 55.65, thus bringing the BBSSI to 53.57 points on the scoreboard.

**Good news for the Western Balkans is that, comparing the results of the 2020 edition of Balkan Barometer<sup>2</sup> and of the 2021 Special Security Balkan Barometer, there has been a positive change in perceptions of security at regional level.** One year ago, unhappy respondents greatly outnumbered their more satisfied counterparts, 46% to 24%.<sup>3</sup> Now, the security situation is perceived more positively, with 38% of satisfied and 30% of dissatisfied respondents.

**The region finds it very important to work on addressing the security challenges in the Western Balkans, such as combating terrorism, fighting organised crime and strengthening border security, in order to ensure the internal security of the region.** In this respect, the highest importance was given to addressing the challenges related to serious and organised crime and financial crime (92%), followed by work on combating terrorism (88%), migrant crisis (86%), and violent extremism and cybersecurity (84%).

**The survey indicates that gun ownership is not an attractive option for the Western Balkans**

**citizens,** with only 6% on regional average of those who would consider owning a gun, compared to the overwhelming 91% of those who would not. That is compared to 15% and 70%, respectively, when the same question was posed to the respondents in the Balkan Barometer 2020 Survey. Therefore, we may note a decline in attractiveness of gun ownership, at least as far as reported in this survey.

Looking at the average for the Western Balkans, an **overwhelming majority of the respondents (70%) believe that the migrants entering the respondents' respective economy increase the security risks for their economy.** Less than a third disagree with that sentiment. It is also notable that only 2% do not have or refused to express their opinion, indicating that the question is a highly polarising one, with almost all respondents having a clear stand on the issue.

**Natural disasters are perceived as a serious security threat by the Western Balkans citizens.** 77% or more than two thirds share this opinion. This prevalence holds true for each individual economy, being lowest in Albania – 63% and highest in Serbia – at 82%. There is also a very small proportion of those who do not have an opinion or refuse to share it, indicating that the awareness on the impact of natural disasters is widely spread.

**Hybrid threats attract the attention and understanding of the WB6 public with regard to their negative role as a potential destabilising factor on the political, economic, and security**

**situation in their home economies.** That disinformation is a new way of warfare that state and non-state actors wage against their economy is considered by the vast majority

of respondents across the region, as many as 76% of them, while almost one-fifth (19%) of respondents do not perceive disinformation in that regard.

<sup>2</sup> The Balkan Barometer Public Opinion Surveys (2015-2020) have only partly covered security issues, therefore the correlation between some findings in this survey and the BB PO can only be applied for some segments, mainly related to perceptions of the use of guns.

<sup>3</sup> The general security satisfaction is measured in annual Balkan Barometer surveys, starting from 2015.



## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Whereas security ranks as the principal and foremost priority of each nation, the specific set of circumstances of the Western Balkans makes the security of this region a highly potent topic, for the regional economies as well as for its partners, particularly the European Union. A relatively recent history of armed conflict, geographical and geopolitical positioning, lagging socio-economic development and much needed reforms in the area of rule of law make this region vulnerable to a range of security threats, with implications to the overall quality of life and economic progress. In addition, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 presented a new challenge, raising questions related to preparedness and response in an epidemiological catastrophe.

From illegal migrations, border security, organised crime and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, to cyber security, disinformation and natural and man-made disaster risk, security issues have been evolving, illegal activities and actors adapting, and cooperation within the region and between the region and the EU increasing in importance. Each of the threats and risks has a multidimensional character, requiring a holistic and coordinated approach rather than simplification or reductionism.

Western Balkans region has emerged as a key transit route for refugees and migrants. The numbers of newly registered migrants and asylum seekers in the region have, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, been steadily raising, from 1383 in January 2018 to 7151 in December 2019. There are now about 200,000 migrants stuck across the Balkans. While a challenge for internal and border security management, with further implications for organised crime in the sense of human trafficking, this has at the same time also been a humanitarian and financial crisis, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

In the past, Western Balkans economies saw a wave of their citizens joining foreign fighters or terrorist cells in other parts of the globe – between 2012 and 2017, it is estimated that about 1,000 Western Balkans citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq, and more than 160 fighters have been jailed for their involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Now, the economies will be faced not only with the priority of preventing radicalisation in segments of their societies, but also with reintegrating returnees, particularly women and children. By the end of 2019, there have been some 485 returnees from the foreign battlefields, and additional 475, mostly children and women, still remain. At the moment, Western Balkans is the region with the highest concentration of returned foreign terrorist fighters in Europe.

Western Balkans economies have been hard at work, under the guidance and support of UNDP/ SEESAC, to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Still, in 2020 there were 2887 firearm-related incidents, of which 529 occurred in a criminal context. A strong gender dimension is evident in firearm violence, with men prevailing as both perpetrators and victims, whereas notably in 2020 only 2% of perpetrators were women while comprising 20% of the victims. Moreover, Western Balkans is often either the source of or the smuggling route for illicit firearms particularly on their way to the European Union, resulting in the proposal by the European Commission to implement a single action plan for both the EU and South East Europe partners for 2020-2025.

COVID-19 pandemic has returned to the forefront the questions related to disaster preparedness and prevention, be it natural, man-made or health-related disasters. South East Europe, of which the Western Balkans is part, is particularly prone to disasters such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and similar. In these events as well as

during the pandemic, regional cooperation has emerged as an irreplaceable tool of better risk preparedness and management.

Proliferation of disinformation or misinformation, popularly dubbed 'fake news', poses a security threat on its own, or may exacerbate existing security issues by spreading panic, providing harmful advice or diminishing trust in government and public institutions. While studies show that fake news spreads six times faster than the truth, Western Balkans citizens are more likely to trust it than their EU counterparts. Taking the current pandemic as an example, Media Literacy Index suggests that Western Balkans is most susceptible to disinformation in Europe. Additionally, 73% of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia believe that the threat from coronavirus is exaggerated, compared to 70% of French, Dutch, Austrians and Italians who do not. Unsurprisingly, this affects the efficiency of public response and success of containment measures.

Addressing security challenges, defining strong and viable security policies aligned with the EU practices and retaining and enhancing commitment to cooperation are crucial ingredients for advancing the region on the path to EU accession. The demand for a coordinated individual and collective action was reiterated in the Zagreb Declaration concluded at the EU-Western Balkans Summit under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU. It committed the EU and the region to advance their cooperation on core security issues, complemented by intra-Western Balkans cooperation and drawing on EU tools and frameworks.

Security has also been an integral element of the Berlin Process, and important cooperation initiatives have been put forward on strengthening information exchange between law enforcement agencies, acting to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, and addressing the issues connected to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The latest 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy by the European Commission noted both progress and stagnation in efforts

to combat organised crime, fight terrorism and violent extremism, tackle disinformation and hybrid threats and manage efficiently the refugee crisis and irregular migration. Collaboration and partnership are still identified as the most appropriate tools of meeting these challenges, in addition to policy reforms in each individual economy.

Indeed, the region has seen a number of initiatives dealing with matters of regional security, and it became important to ensure synergy and streamlining among them. It was in that spirit that the IISG was transferred under the RCC umbrella, which already provides political mandate to the SEESAC and DPPI active in the Western Balkans. In addition, a large portion of RCC's own security portfolio has been dedicated to promoting regional cooperation and exchange in the field of disinformation and hybrid threats.

At the regional level, issues related to migration, refugees and asylum-seekers are being studied and tackled by the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), whereas the Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) provides a centre for a concerted and coordinated fight against corruption.

As the security environment changes, new threats and challenges emerge, governments and security actors must stay vigilant, proactive and aloof. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the importance of information sharing, adaptability and smart policy mixes in order to minimise the negative effects. Furthermore, it reconfirmed in the most dramatic way the inherent interconnected nature of security issues. It is more than ever evident that there is no security without collective security.

# PUBLIC OPINION SECURITY SENTIMENT SURVEY

In order to monitor changes over time in present public sentiment and optimism when it comes to questions related to security, the 1st Special Security Public Opinion survey takes the approach of measuring the sentiment index. This Balkan Public Security Sentiment Index (BPSSI) is composed of five questions:

1. How satisfied are you with the way things are going in your place of living? (Answers: 5 point scale)
2. How satisfied are you with the security situation in your national economy? (Answers: 5 point scale)
3. How satisfied are you with the security situation of your household? (Answers: 5 point scale)
4. What are your expectations for the next year? Do you think that in 12 months your security situation will be better, worse or the same?
5. What are your expectations for the security in your national economy? Do you think that in 12 months the state of the security will be better, worse or the same?

BPSSI represents a measure of the current and future state/expectations regarding the general situation, situation at economy level as well as the situation of individual households. It is a measure that helps monitor changes in time at the regional level (Western Balkans) and the level of individual economies.

The index is constructed with the answers on five-point scales scored as follows: I'm completely dissatisfied - 0 points, I'm mostly

unsatisfied - 25 points, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied - 50 points; I'm mostly satisfied - 75 points, I'm completely satisfied - 100 points. Answers for the Q4 and Q5 are scored as follows: better - 100 points, worse - 0 points, the same - 50 points. After responses are recoded, average value is calculated for the whole SEE region as well as for each economy separately.

The index values are expressed on a scale of 0 to 100.

BPSSI was further divided in the two sub-indexes with the aim to monitor separately the present sentiment among population as well as their expectations for the future or their degree of optimism.

- a) BPSSI - Present Situation Index
- b) BPSSI - Expectation Index<sup>4</sup>

It is not unusual that expectations are more optimistic than the assessment of the current state of affairs. However, there is no bigger discrepancy between the expectations and the perceptions of present situation with the BPSSI - present situation index standing at 54.50 and BPSSI - expectation index at 55.65, thus bringing the BBSSI to 53.57 points on the scoreboard.

Large discrepancies are observed between individual economies in relation to sentiment index. The most optimistic economy is shown to be Montenegro, with present sentiment index scoring 70. Slightly lower (69) is its expectation index, still leaving Montenegro on the top of the scale.

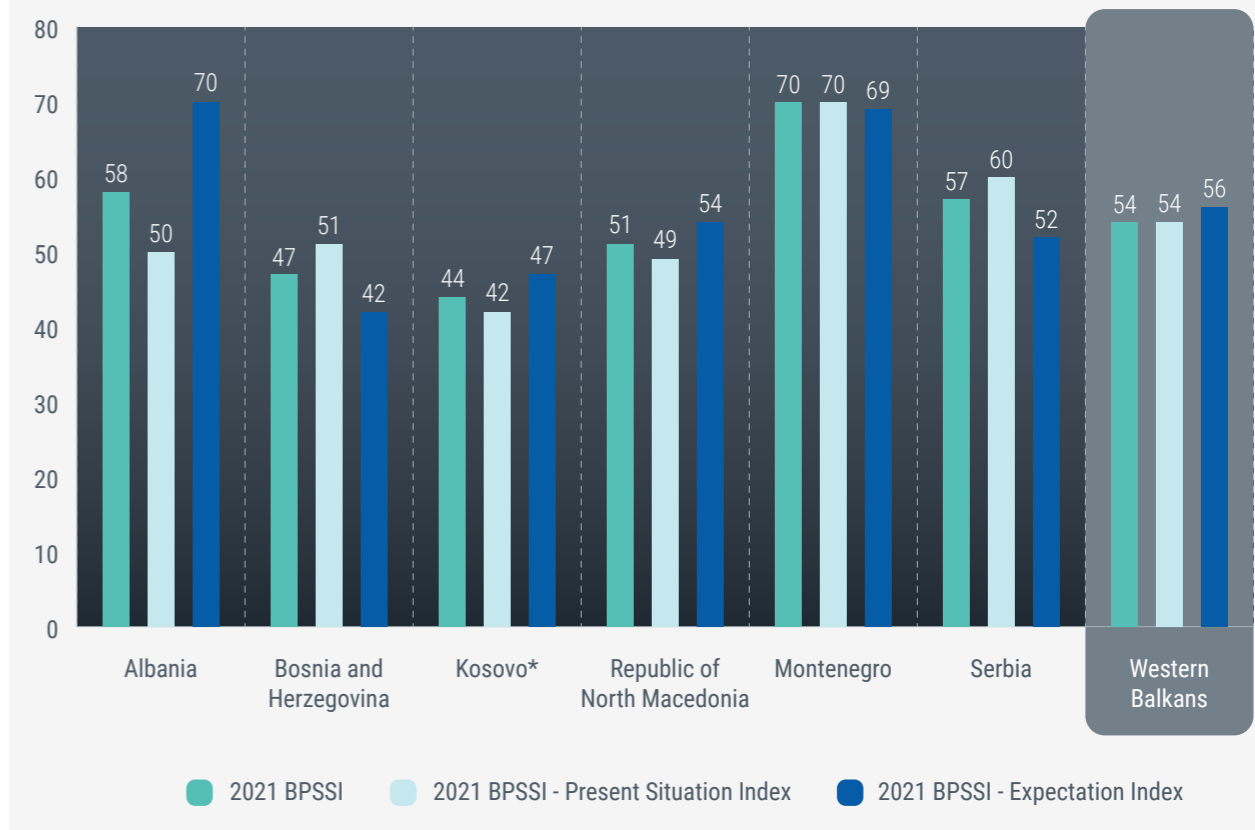
<sup>4</sup> The approach replicates the one taken by the Balkan Barometer general annual surveys on public and business opinion in the SEE.

Montenegro is followed by Albania, where BPSSI stands at 58. However, what differentiates Albania from all the rest is that although the present sentiment index is 50, the

future expectation index is the highest in the region (70). This trend is also observed in North Macedonia with expectation index being higher than the current satisfaction.

**Figure 1: Balkan Public Security Sentiment Index (BPSSI)**

(Scores on a scale from 0 to 100)



Serbia is also scoring high on the security sentiment index (57), having the present satisfaction rate at 60, second to that of Montenegro. However, the future expectations are more pessimistic, with the score lower by 4 points relative to the regional average.

Finally, the most pessimistic economies with regards to the security situation are Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*, standing on the scale with 47 and 44, respectively. Between themselves they differ on the current satisfaction index and the future expectation index, with Bosnia and Herzegovina more satisfied with the current situation (51) than being optimistic for future developments (42) in comparison to Kosovo\* where expectation

index is higher than present index (47 and 42, respectively).

Overall, the citizens of the WB region are satisfied with the way things are going in their place of living related to the security situation in their national economy and their household, while also being optimistic for the developments in the next 12 months. Therefore, it can be concluded that these are rather positive sentiments throughout the region (see Figure 1).

## A. GENERAL SECURITY PERCEPTION

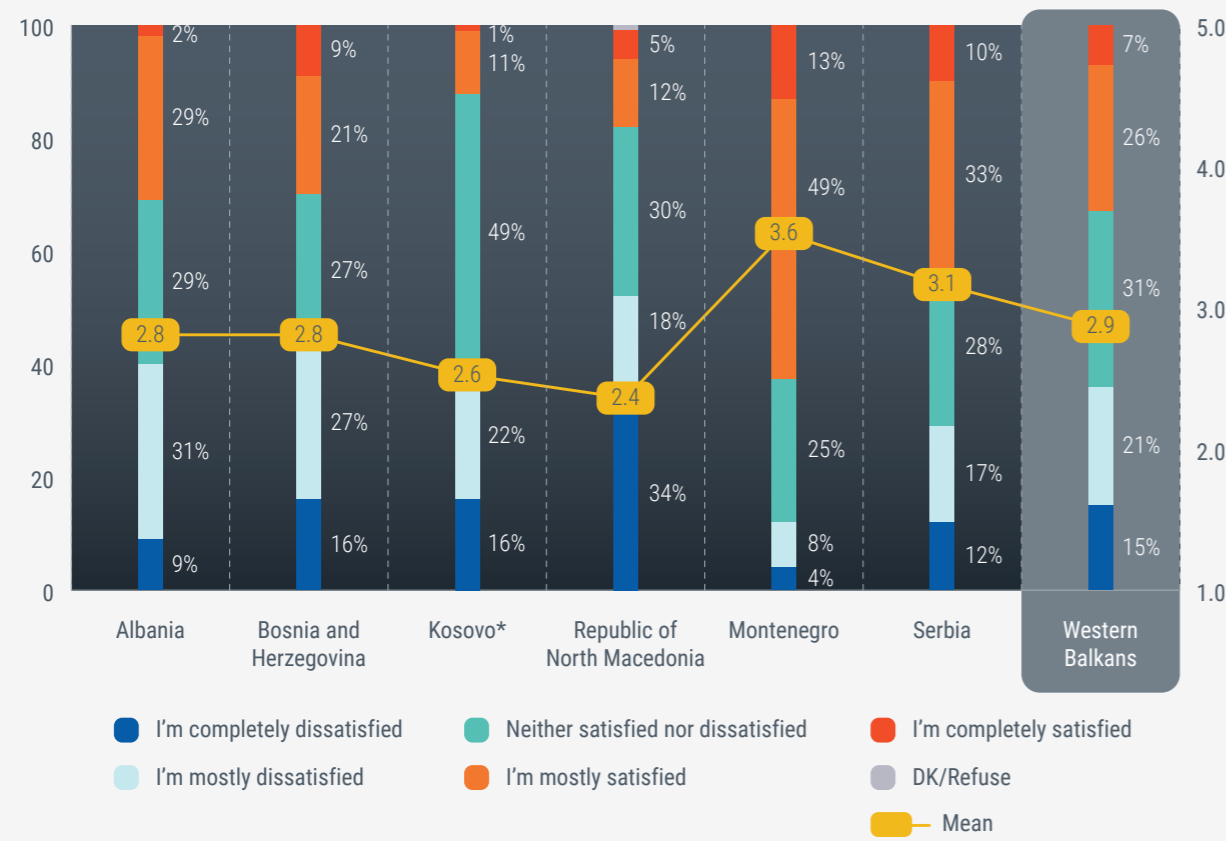
General security perception chapter contains questions related to the recent respondents' experiences with the general and security situation in each of the Western Balkans economies. At the same time, it also contains questions related to their personal security perception and predictions for the future when it comes to the most negative impact on their feeling of security in their place of living.

In terms of the overall situation and how things are going, respondents in the WB6 region have almost equally divided attitudes (dissatisfied 36%; satisfied 33%; 31% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied), with the exception of Montenegro where the majority of respondents (62%) are mostly or completely satisfied with how things are going in their economy (see

Figure 2). However, the other five economies share among themselves similar responses. Respondents from North Macedonia have the most pessimistic views, and most of them are not satisfied with how things are going in their economy (52% are mostly or completely dissatisfied), while only 17% are satisfied. If we compare gender-related answers, amongst all WB6 respondents to the question: "How satisfied are you with the way things are going in your economy?" men are more satisfied (40%) than women (32%).

Good news for the Western Balkans. Comparing the results of the last year's 2020 edition of Balkan Barometer and the 2021 Special Security Balkan Barometer edition, in terms of perceptions of security situation in respondent's economy, there has been a positive change in perceptions of security at regional level. One year ago, unhappy respondents greatly outnumbered their more satisfied

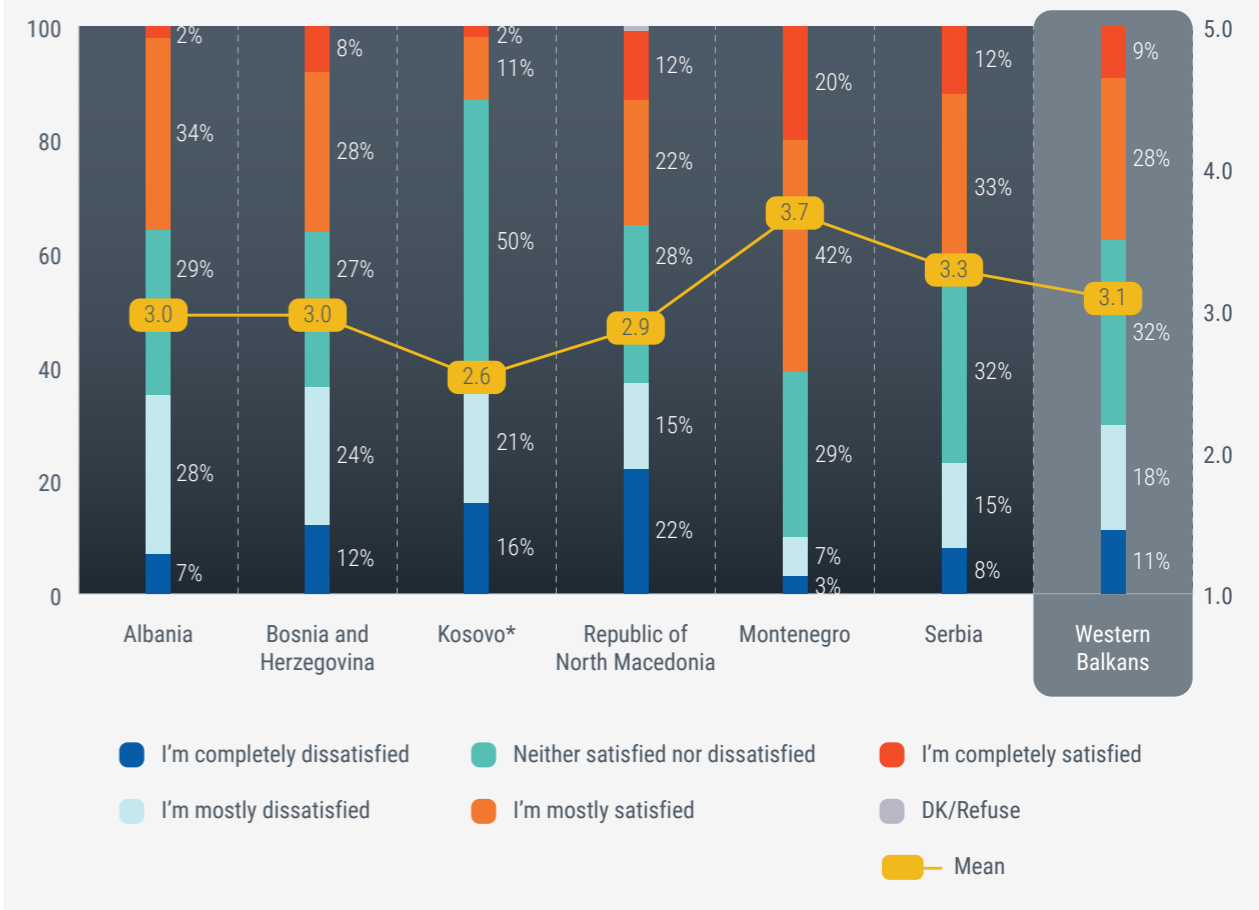
**Figure 2: How satisfied are you with the way things are going in your economy?**  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 5, share of total, %)



counterparts, 46% to 24%. Now, the security situation is perceived more positively, as 38% are satisfied and 30% dissatisfied. In other words, the number of dissatisfied decreased by 16%, and the number of satisfied increased by 14%. Considering the WB6 region, slightly more

than one third (38%) perceive security situation as satisfactory, while slightly less than one third (30%) are those who have a dissenting opinion. The third are unallocated responses (32% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied).

**Figure 3: How satisfied are you with the security situation in your economy?**  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 5, share of total, %)



Respondents across the Western Balkans region perceive the security situation in their economy in an almost uniform fashion, except for respondents from Kosovo\* who demonstrated greater scepticism: Kosovo\* stands out with the lowest number of those who perceive the current security situation as satisfying (only 13%), which is significantly lower than in Montenegro (62%), or Serbia (45%). These answers also correspond to the previous question: How satisfied are you with the way things are going in your economy? With the exception of Montenegro and

Serbia, which are the region's most satisfied economies when it comes to the respondents' assessment of the security situation, the other four economies have close to an identical number of respondents dissatisfied with the security situation. Detailed data are showing that satisfaction level with the current security situation decreases with the increase in formal education of the respondent, i.e. respondents with college degree (MA, Ph.D.) are less satisfied than respondents with a high school degree or without formal education.

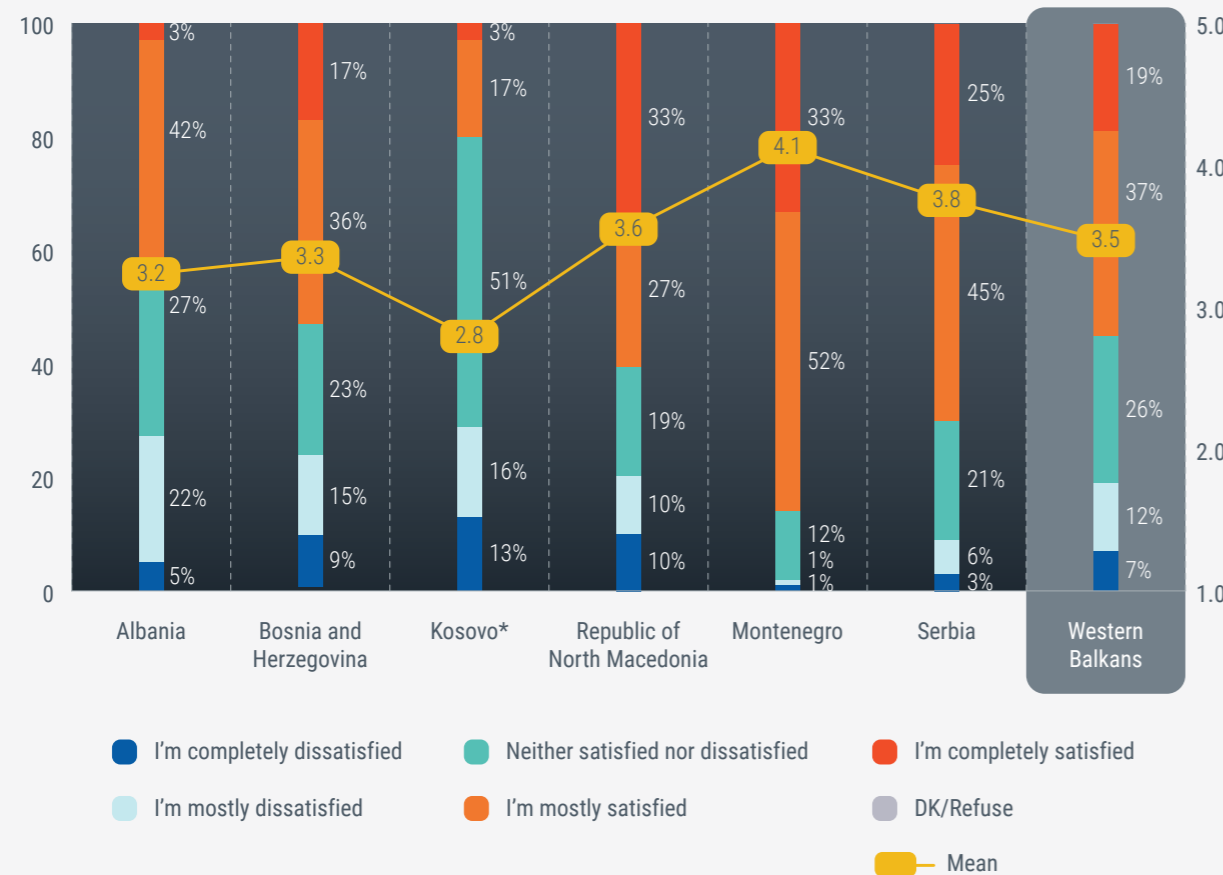


Alongside improvements in the perception of security situation at the regional level, the status of personal security is positive and optimistic. More than half (56%) of all survey participants are satisfied with their personal security situation. Almost one-fifth of all respondents (19%) has an opposite opinion

and is not satisfied with their current security situation. At economy level, Montenegro is home to the highest concentration of satisfied respondents with 85%, while Kosovo\* occupies the other end of the scale with just over a fifth of the population (20%) happy with the personal security situation.

**Figure 4: How satisfied are you with your personal security situation?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 5, share of total, %)



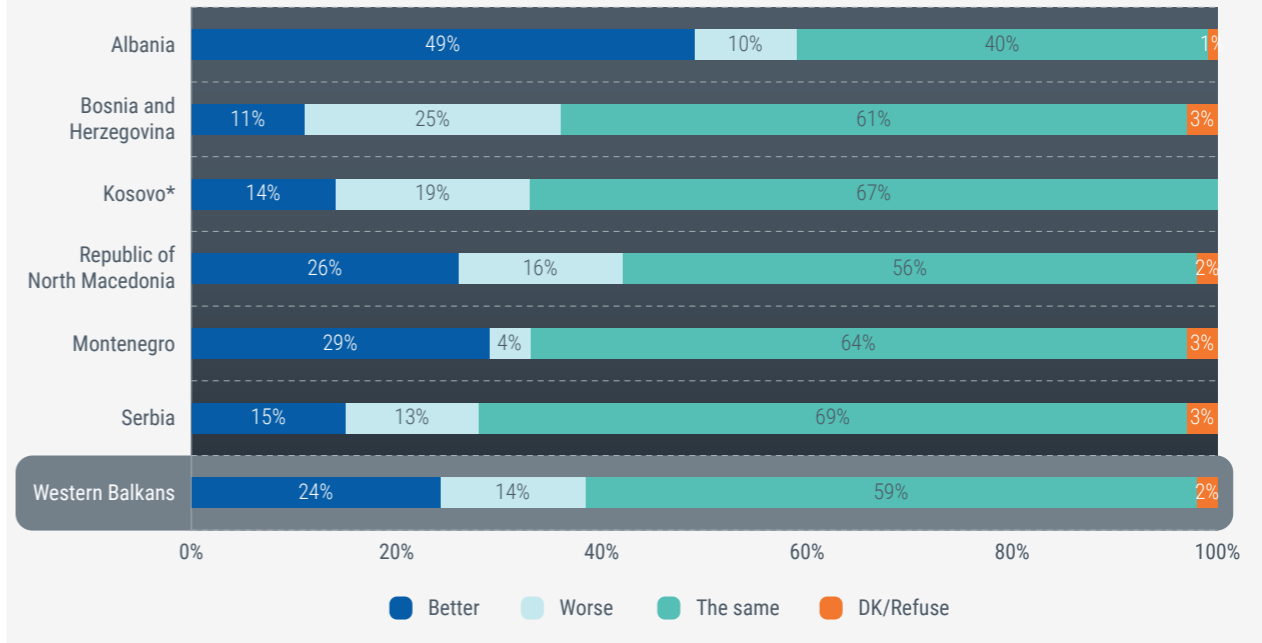
The majority of all respondents (59%) anticipate no change in their personal security situation in the next 12 months. Close to a quarter (24%) of all survey participants expect to see their personal security situation improve against some 14% who expect to see it deteriorate. It is interesting that every fourth respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina believes that his or her personal security will deteriorate from the current situation, and every second respondent from Albania believes that the situation will improve. 69% of respondents from

Serbia believe that the situation will remain unchanged. Women appear to have a more optimistic attitude, with 26% expecting their security situation will improve in the coming period, compared to 22% of men.

At the regional level, some 49% of all respondents expect to see no change in the security situation of their national economies in the coming year. It is encouraging that 31% of respondents expect an improvement while 18% of respondents expect a worsening.

**Figure 5: What are your expectations for the next year? Do you think that in 12 months your personal security situation will be better, worse, the same?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

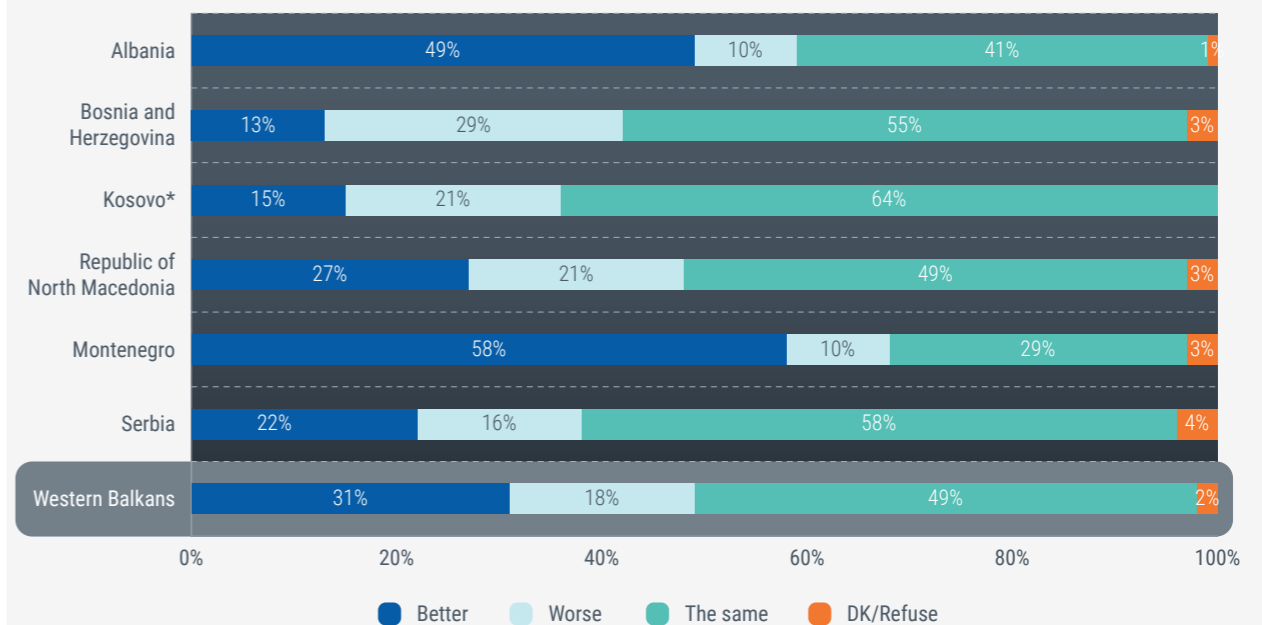


More than half of the respondent population in Montenegro (58%) expect that the state of security in their economy will be better in 12 months. At the same time, only 13% of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina expect

to see an improvement, while 29% believe it will deteriorate. Kosovo\* is the steadiest in terms of security expectations with 64% of respondents not expecting any changes in the security situation in their economy in the next year.

**Figure 6: What are your expectations for the security in your economy? Do you think that in 12 months the state of the security will be better, worse, the same?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

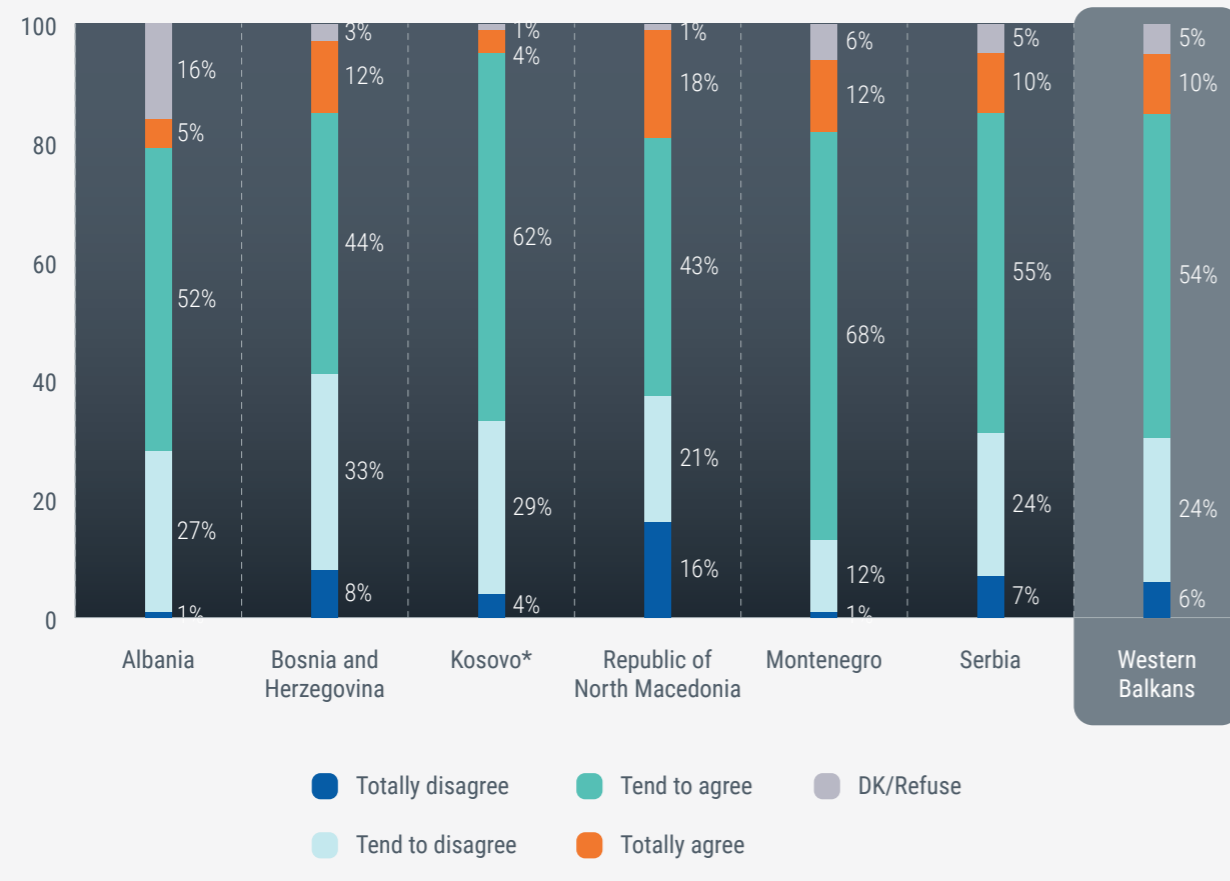


Most of respondents believe that the WB6 region is a secure place to live in (64%), while 30% of respondents do not agree with that statement. Montenegro is once again the region's leading optimist with 80% of respondents believing that the WB6 region is a secure place. The other five

economies are also optimistic: Albania 57%, BiH 56%, Kosovo\* 66%, North Macedonia 61%, Serbia 65%. The highest number of pessimists regarding the security situation of the Western Balkans region was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (41%).

**Figure 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about public/general security: The WB6 region is a secure place to live in.**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

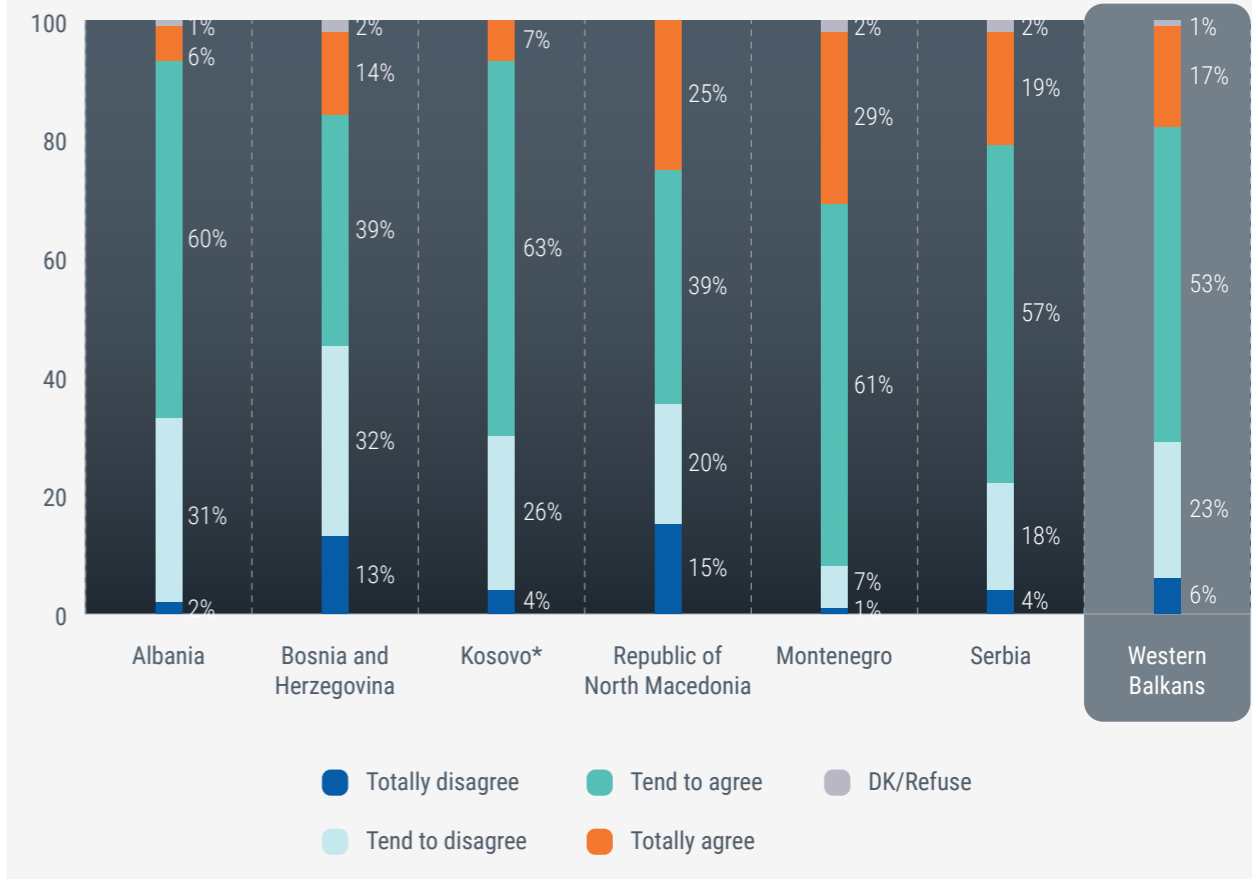


At economy level, the trend of increased optimism in the Western Balkans continues. The vast majority of respondents from the

individual economies of the Western Balkans (70%) consider their economy a safe place to live, versus 29% who do not.

**Figure 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about public/general security: My economy is a secure place to live in.**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)



In terms of the most negative impact on respondents' feeling of security, respondents identified four key problems in the Western Balkans region: economic crises, poverty, social exclusion (63%); crime, organised crime, drugs trafficking, violence, or vandalism (58%); the pandemic (53%); and natural and man-made disasters, climate change, and pollution (29%).

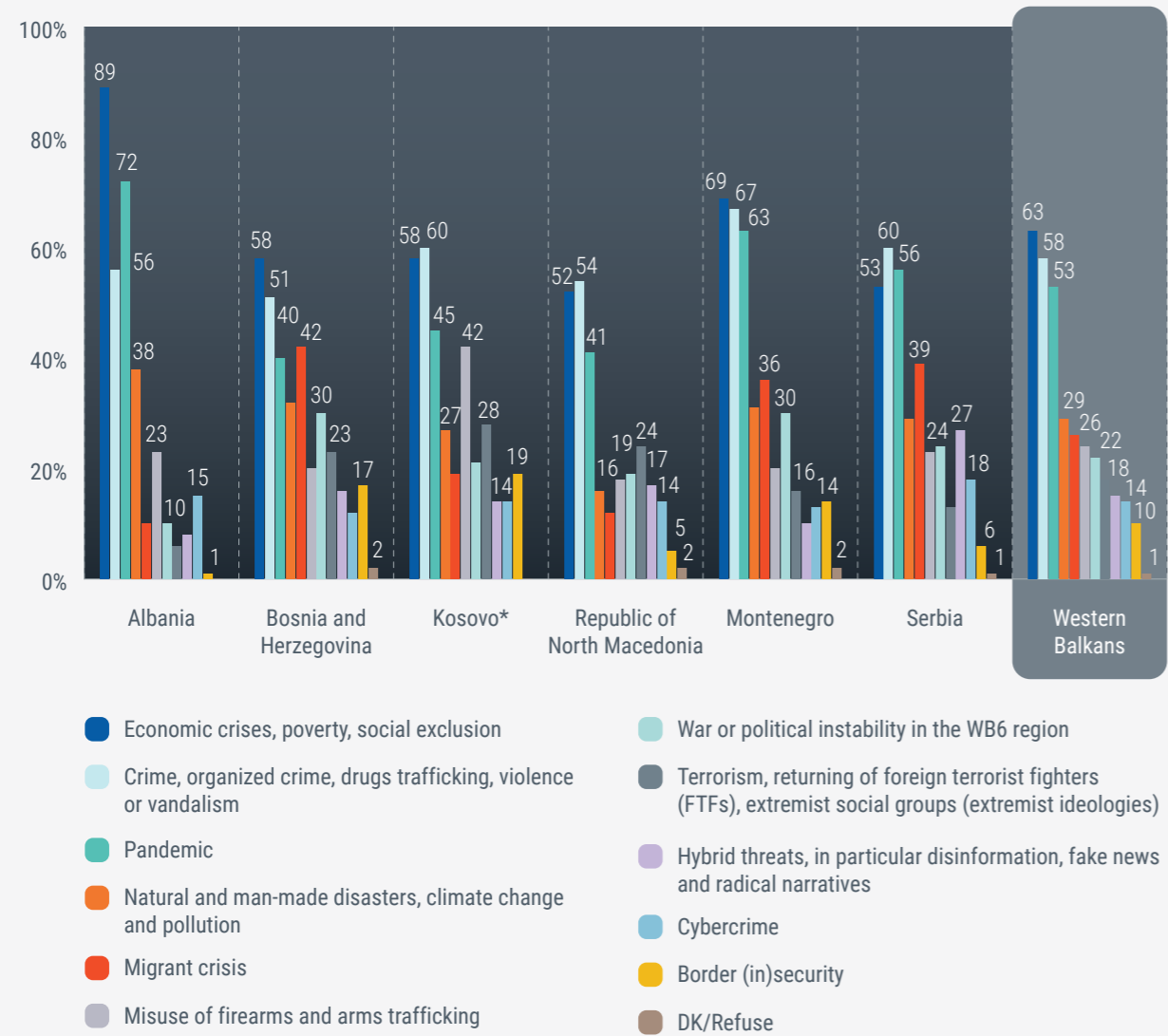
compared to the 2020 edition of the Balkan Barometer when 63% of respondents assessed the migrant crisis to be the greatest security risk. Interestingly, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, and Serbia are the only economies where the economic crises, poverty, social exclusion is not a top concern, but rather crime, organised crime, drugs trafficking, violence, or vandalism.

Migrant crisis is in the fifth place with 26% of responses, which is a significant decrease



**Figure 9: Which 4 (four) of the following have the most negative impact on your feeling of security?**

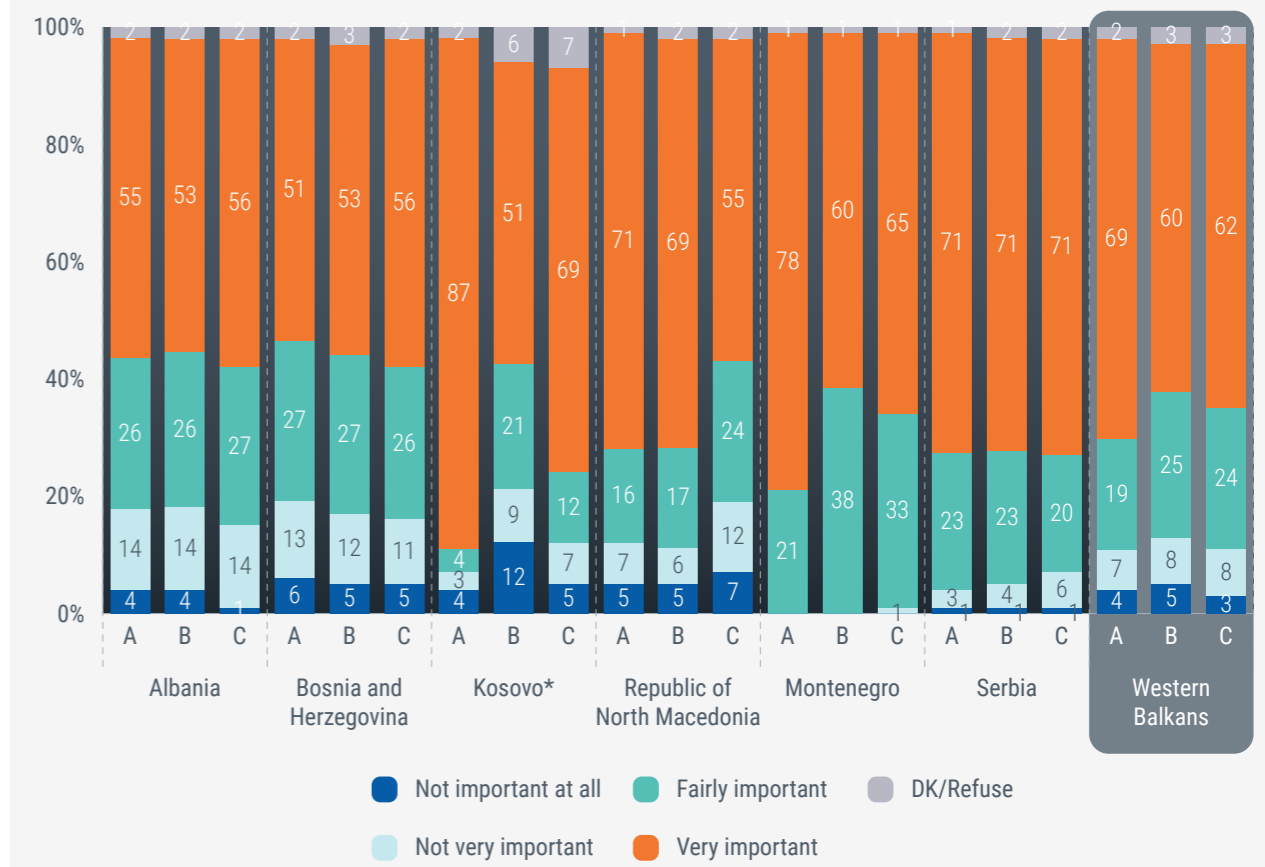
(All respondents, N=6046, maximum 4 (four) answers, share of total, %)



**Figure 10: In your opinion, how important is work on addressing the following CHALLENGES for the internal security of WB6 economies?**

A – Terrorism; B – Violent extremism; C – Migrant crisis

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)



On economy level, the most striking numbers are seen in Montenegro, where 99% of the respondents answered that it is important or fairly important to work on addressing all six named challenges. The rest of the economies of the region have slightly lower percentages in supporting the importance of addressing the abovementioned challenges (see figure 10).

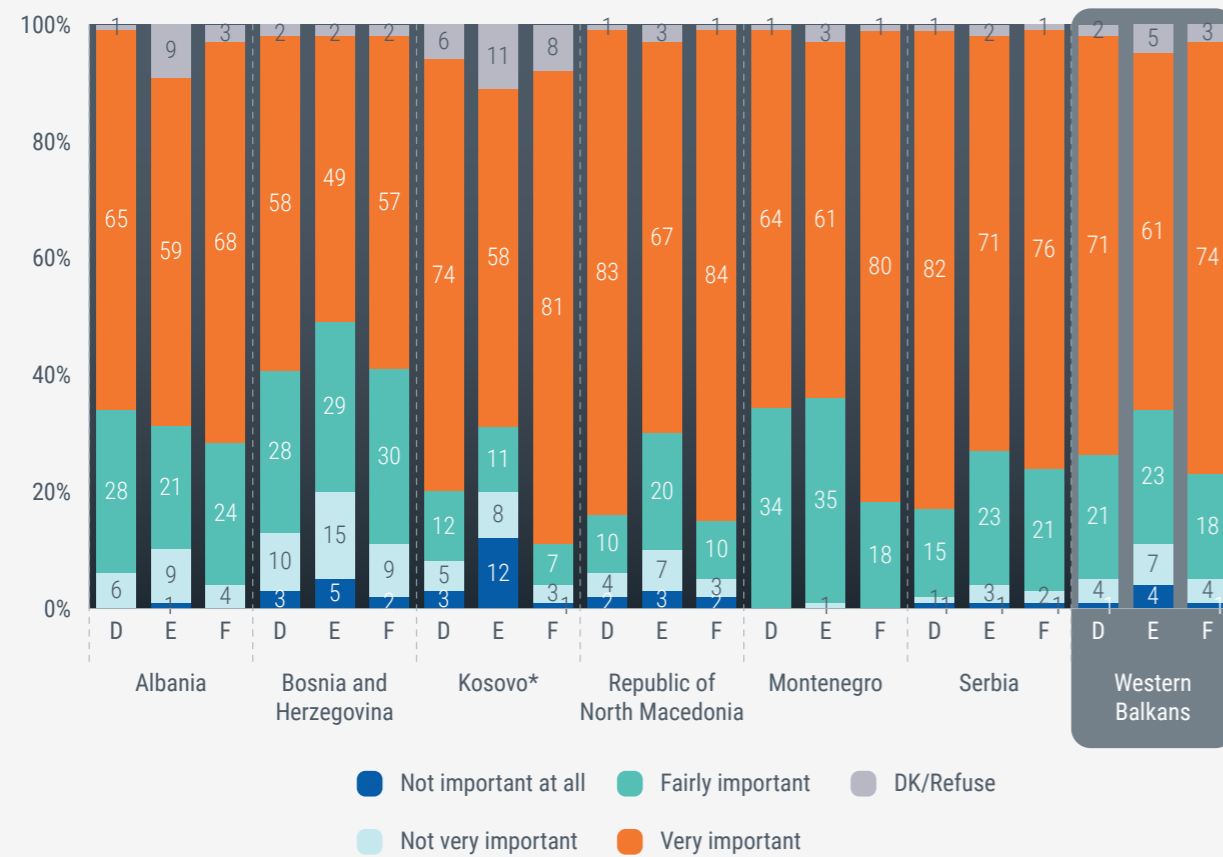
## B. PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM, ORGANISED CRIME AND BORDER SECURITY

The region finds it overall very important to work on addressing the security challenges in the WB6 in order to ensure the internal security of the region. In this respect, the highest importance was given to addressing challenges related to serious and organised crime and

financial crime (92%), followed by combating terrorism (88%), migrant crisis (86%), and violent extremism and cybersecurity (84%).

**Figure 11: In your opinion, how important is work on addressing the following CHALLENGES for the internal security of WB6 economies?**

D – Serious and organised crime; E - Cybersecurity; F - Financial crime  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

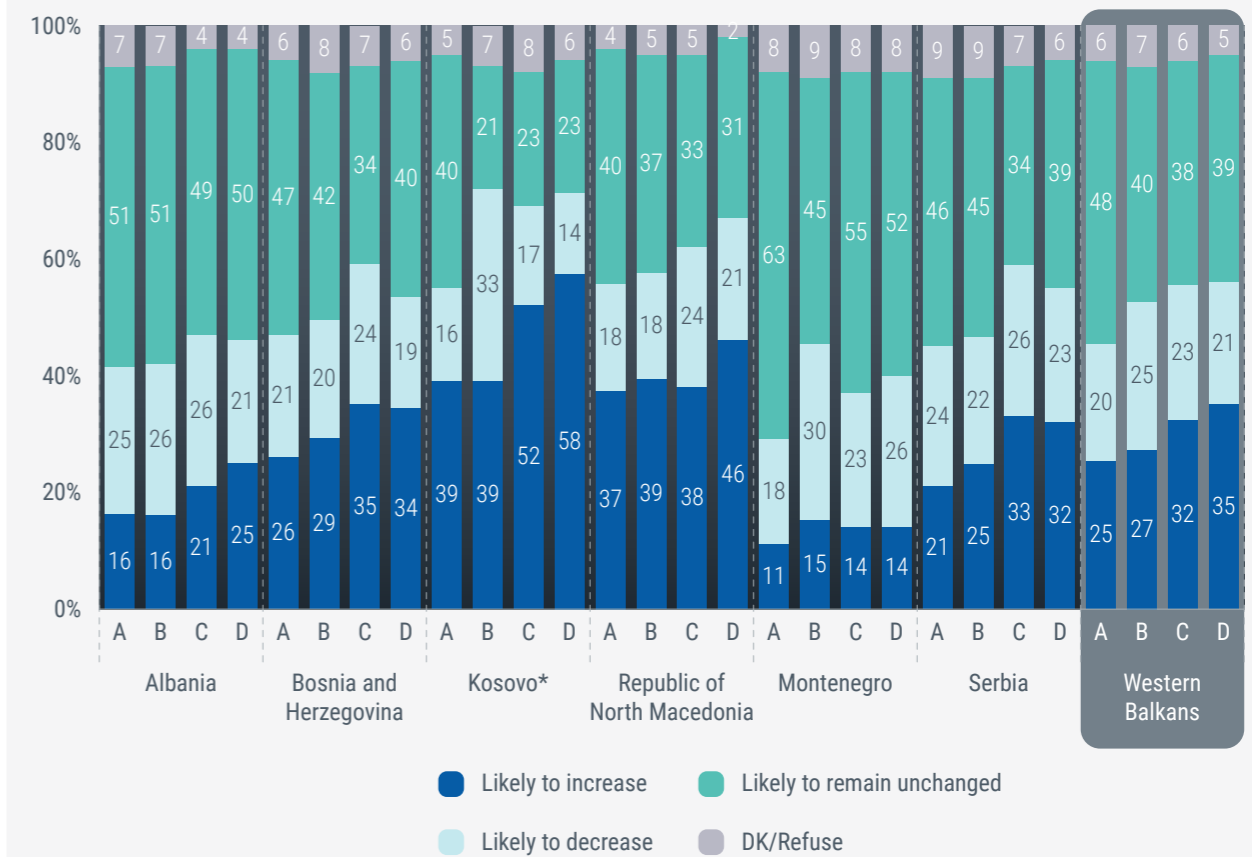


Regarding future expectations, the region mostly thinks that the situation will remain unchanged in terms of individual challenges. However, again the biggest expectations for the situation to worsen are seen in the responses related to organised crime and financial crime where 35% and 36% of the respondents think that

those two challenges to security will increase in the next three years. Although vague, the region detects some optimism. Namely, 25% of the region thinks that the situation related to violent extremism will be better in the next three years, followed by the optimism related to migrant crisis (23%) and terrorism (20%).

**Figure 12: Would you say that the following challenges to the security of the WB6 are likely to increase, decrease or remain unchanged over the next three (3) years?**

A – Terrorism; B – Violent extremism; C – Migrant crisis; D – Serious and organised crime  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 3, share of total, %)

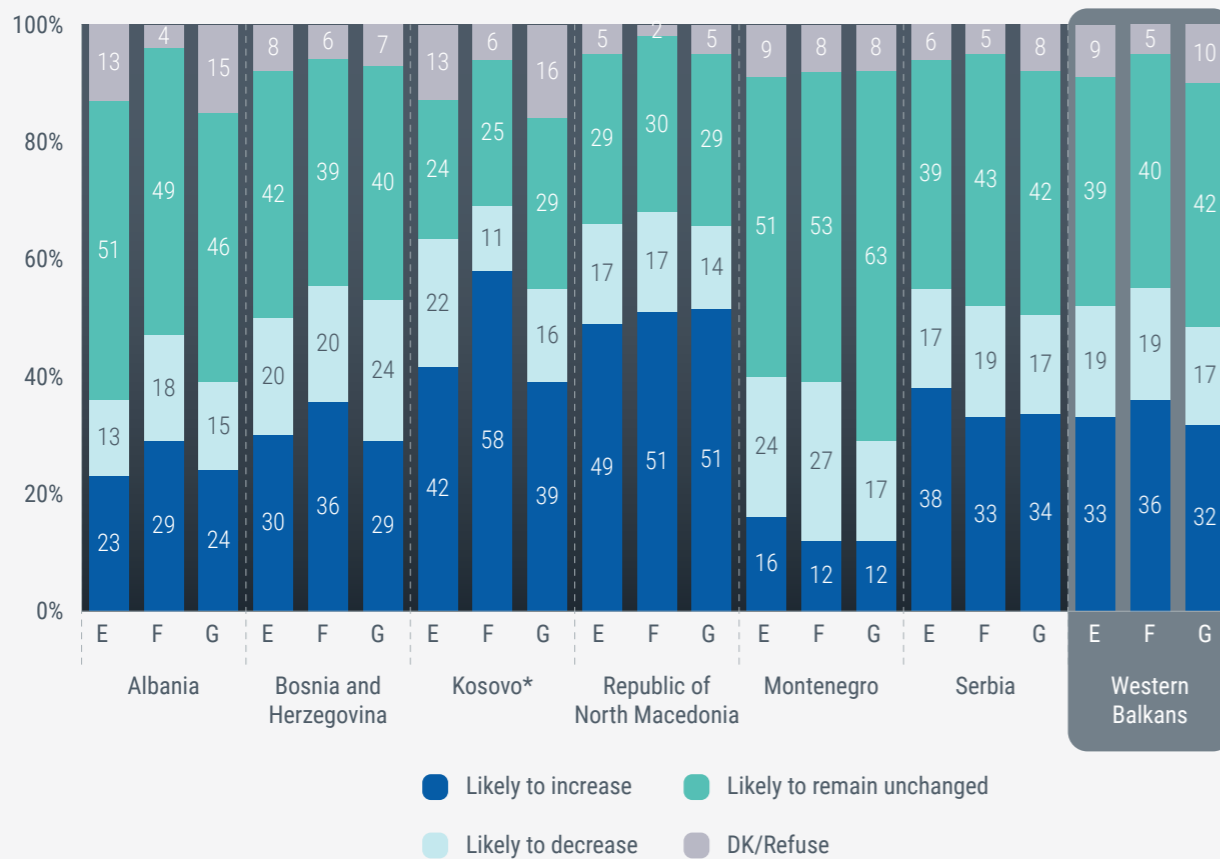


On economy level, the biggest scepticism that things will improve for some of the security challenges, such as serious and organised crime and financial crime (58% per each), are seen in Kosovo\*, while the number of respondents who believe that the situation will be the same in the

next three years is the greatest in Montenegro, especially for challenges such as combating terrorism and financial crime, for which 63% (per challenge) of the respondents believe that the situation is likely to remain unchanged.

**Figure 13: Would you say that the following challenges to the security of the WB6 are likely to increase, decrease or remain unchanged over the next three (3) years?**

E - Cybersecurity; F - Financial crime; G - Online radicalisation  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 3, share of total, %)



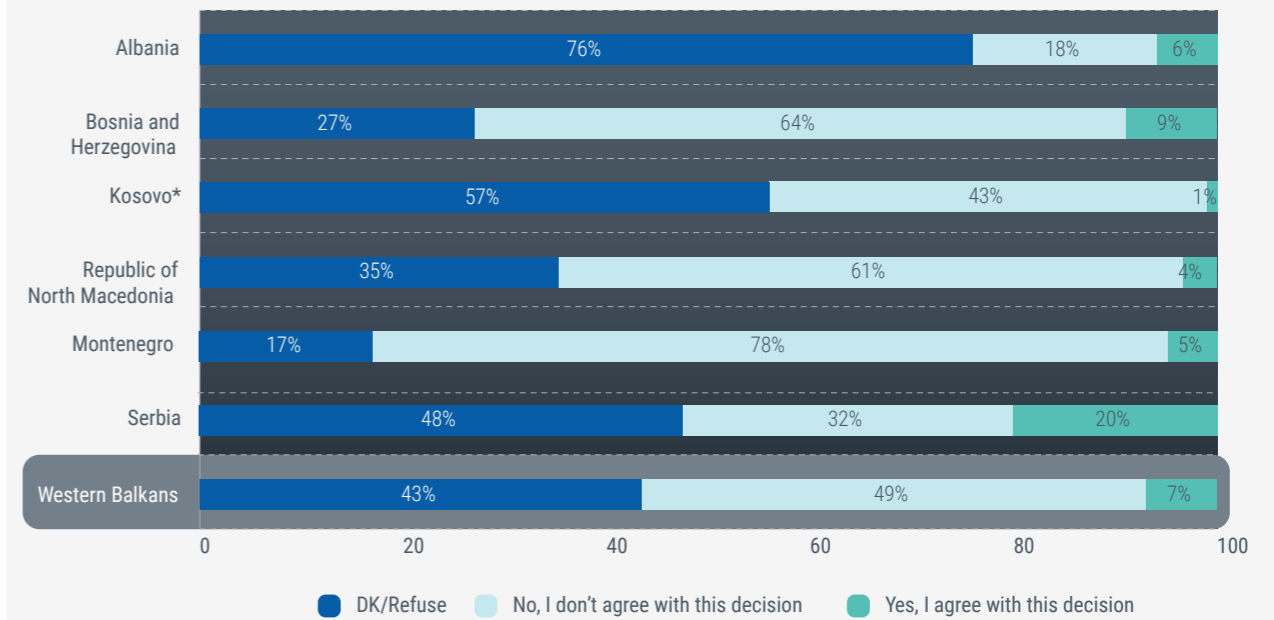
### B.1. FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

The public opinion on the decision of the WB6 governments to allow the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families to their homeland (applying the law accordingly) has been split. Almost half (49%) of the citizens do not agree with the decision, while only a somewhat lesser percentage (43%) support it. On individual economy level, the biggest resistance to this decision is seen in

Montenegro (78%), Bosnia and Hercegovina (64%) and North Macedonia (61%), while the biggest support comes from the respondents in Albania and Kosovo\*, where 76% and 57% respectively agree that the return of FTFs to their home economy should be allowed.

**Figure 14: The WB6 economies decided to allow the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their country of origin, applying the law accordingly. Do you agree with this decision?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

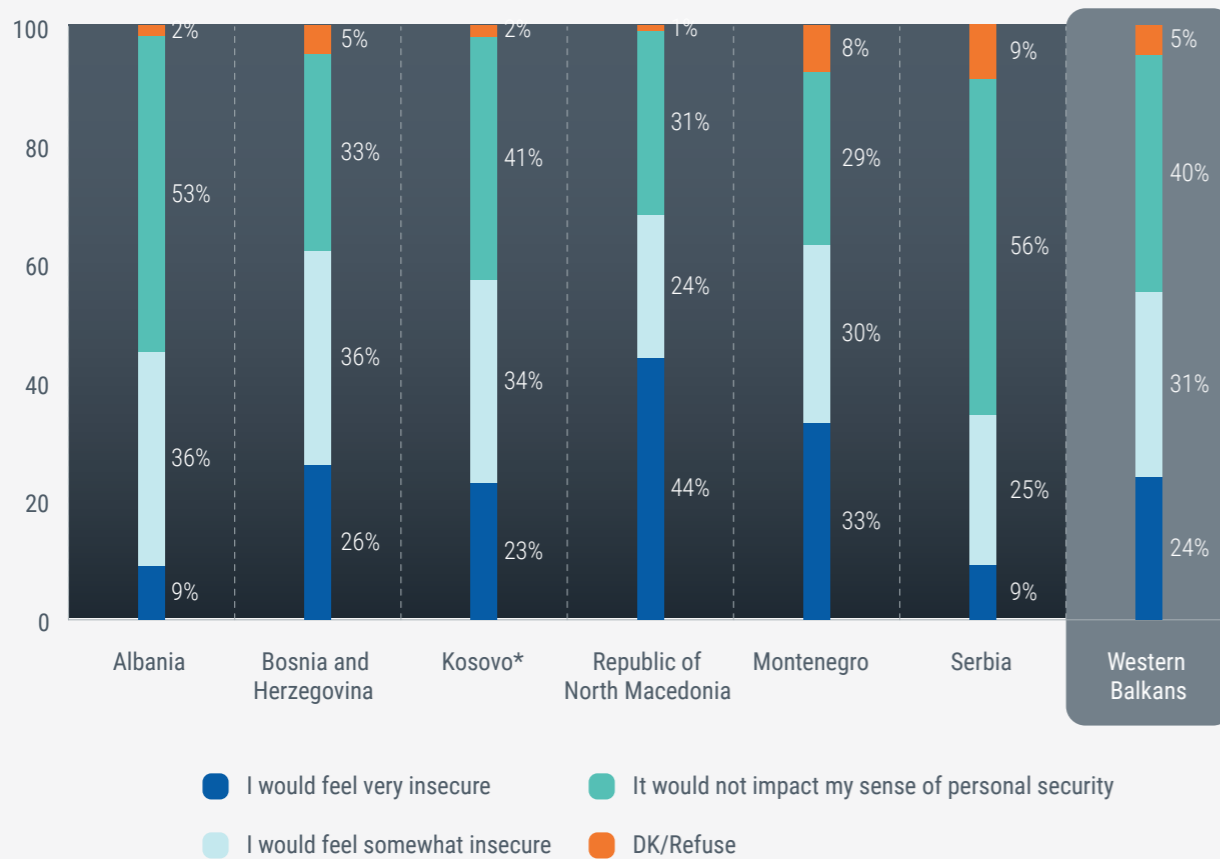


Furthermore, 40% of the WB6 respondents said that the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their local communities would not impact their sense of personal security, while 51% believe that they would feel somewhat insecure or very insecure if the FTFs and their families would return to their local communities.

The biggest concern is noted in North Macedonia, where 68% of the citizens think that they would feel somewhat or very insecure if the FTFs return to their communities, followed by Bosnia and Hercegovina with 61%, while the least concern is observed in Serbia where 51% of the respondents said that their return would not impact their personal security.

**Figure 15: To what extent would the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their local communities impact your sense of personal security?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

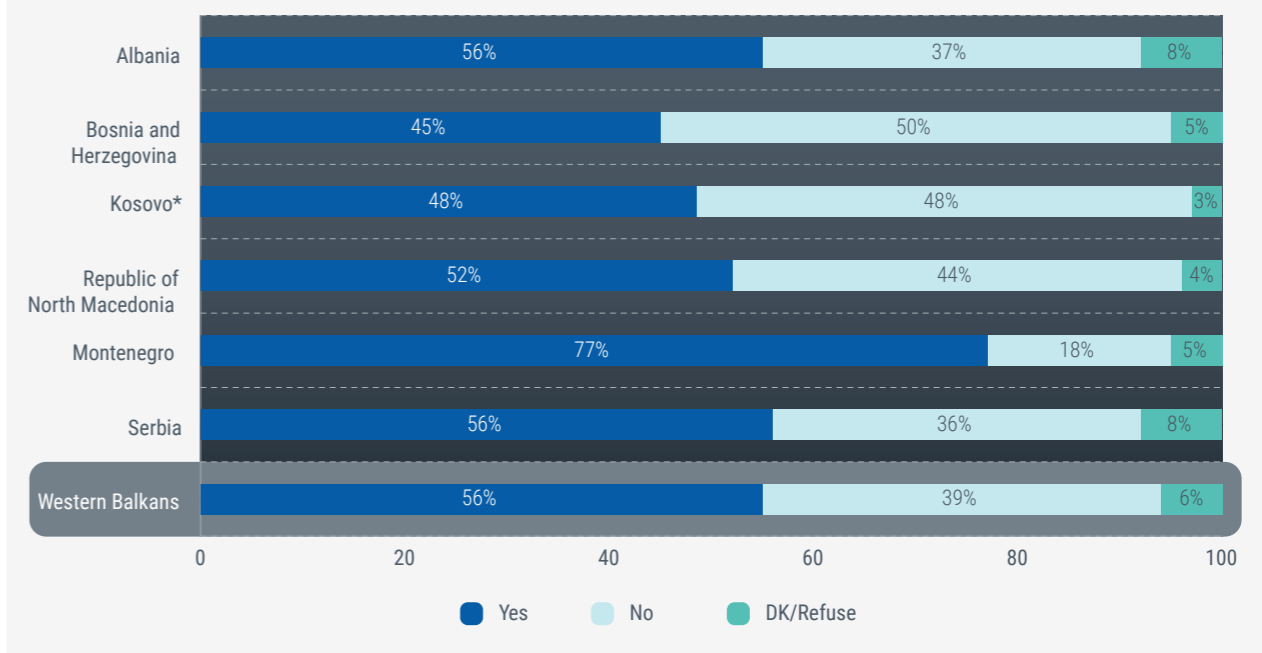


More than half (56%) of the region's respondents agree that the police and other law enforcement authorities in the WB6 economies are doing enough to fight terrorism, while 39% do not agree with that observation. On individual level, the biggest support to the work done by the government authorities in combating terrorism

is witnessed in Montenegro (77%), while least support is seen in Bosnia in Hercegovina with half of the respondents disagreeing with the statement that the police and other law enforcement authorities in the economy are doing enough to fight terrorism.

**Figure 16: Do you agree with the following statement: The police and other law enforcement authorities in your economy are doing enough to fight terrorism.**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



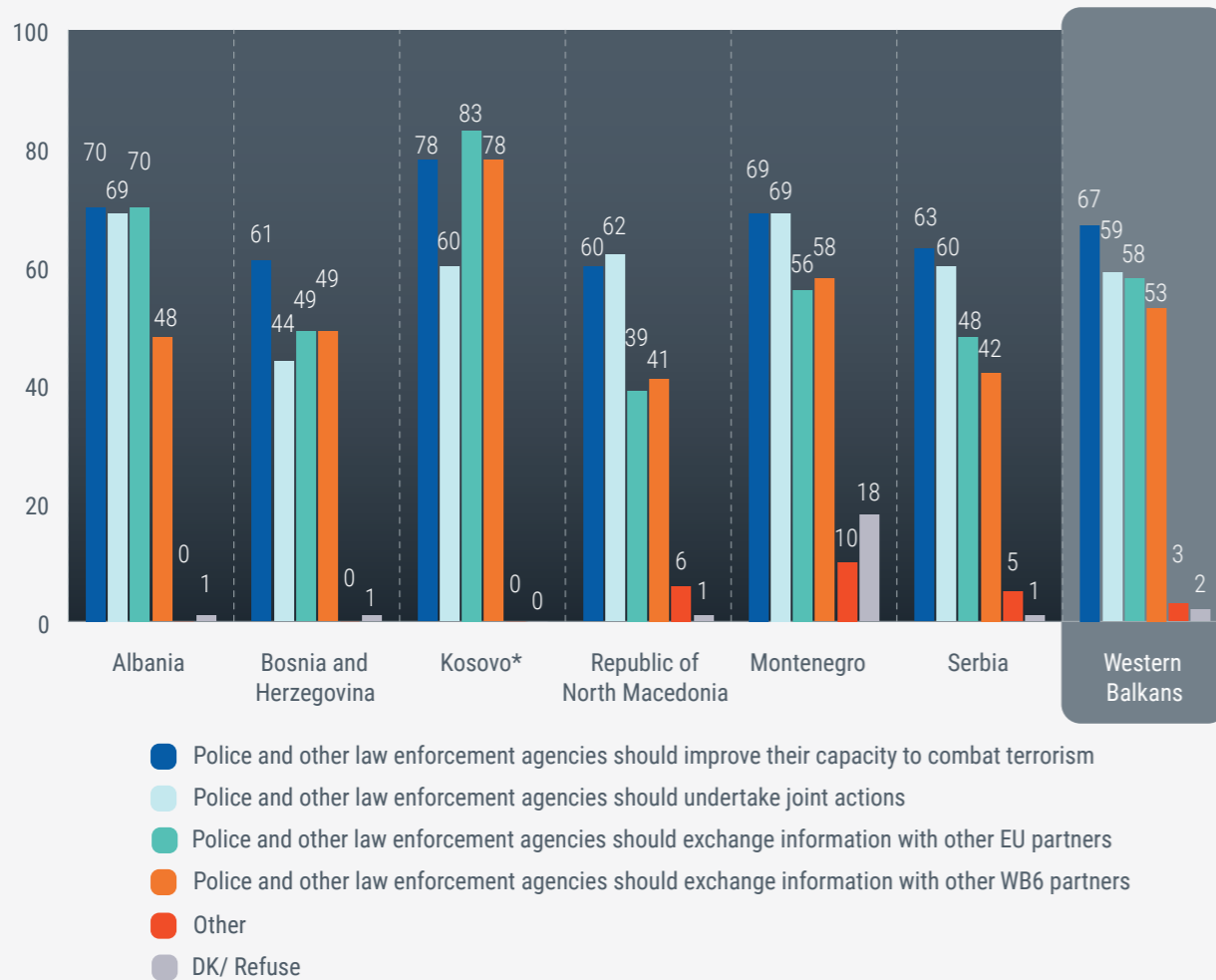
The respondents from the region think that in order to fight terrorism more effectively, the police and law enforcement agencies should focus on the following activities:

- They should work on improving their capacities to combat terrorism (67%);
- They should undertake joint actions with the rest of the WB6 economies (59%);
- They should exchange information with other EU partners (58%); and
- They should exchange information with the partners from the WB region (53%).

On economy level, in almost every case the need to improve the capacities of the law enforcement authorities is seen as the most important action that needs to be undertaken by the economies' governments, with the exception of Kosovo\* where the need to exchange information on terrorism with EU partners is seen as the most important aspect (83%).

**Figure 17: In your opinion what should the law enforcement authorities be doing to fight terrorism more effectively?**

(All respondents with answer No at Q17., N=2335, multiple answer, share of total, %)



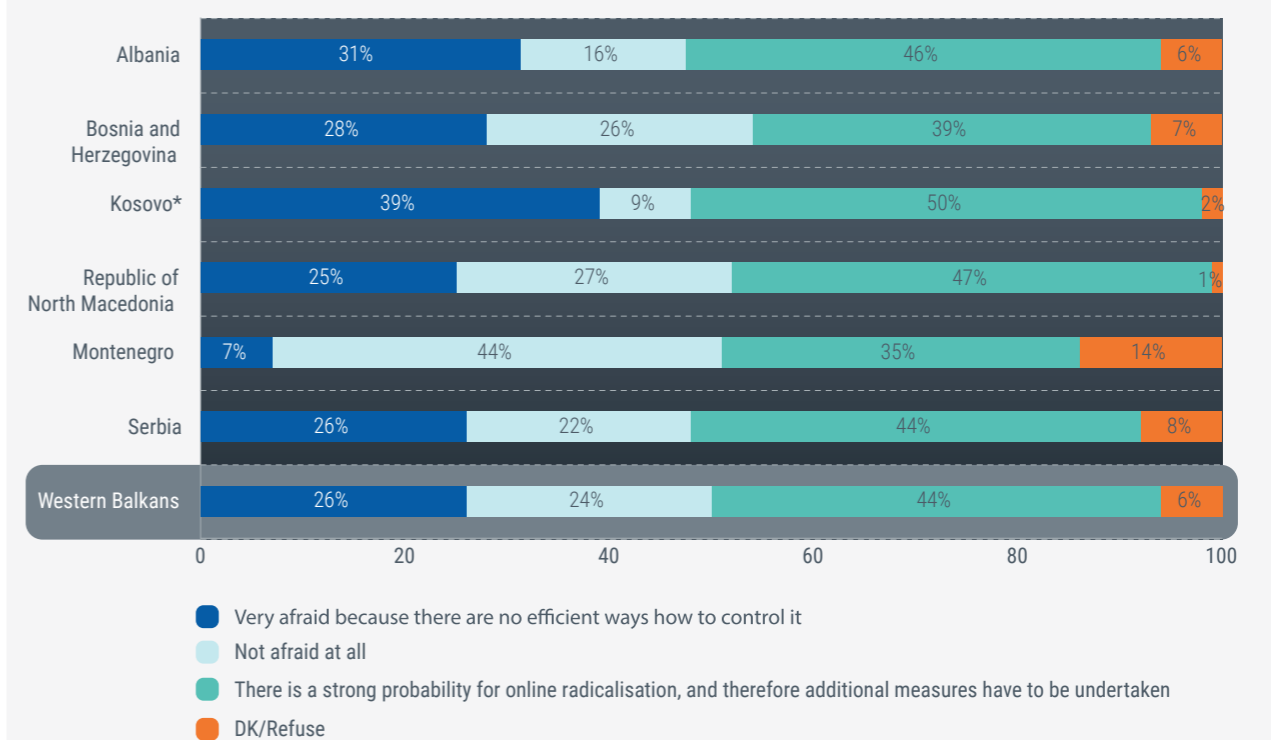
Online radicalisation of youth in WB6 has been observed as a big threat. Namely, 44% of the region's respondents indicated that there is a strong probability for online radicalisation of their children or their relatives and friends and therefore additional measures have to be undertaken. 26% of the interviewed population are very afraid because there are no efficient ways to control online radicalisation. Almost the same per cent of the respondents have said that they are not afraid of online radicalisation at all.

The biggest concern that the online radicalisation cannot be controlled is observed in Kosovo\* (38%), followed by Albania (31%)

and Bosnia and Hercegovina (28%), while the least concern is witnessed in Montenegro, where 44% of the respondents are not afraid at all and only 7% of them stated that are very afraid that their children might get radicalised via online tools and mechanisms. However, the percentages of respondents who agree that there is strong probability for online radicalisation and therefore additional measures have to be undertaken is almost the same across the region, with the biggest percentage in Kosovo\* (50%), followed by North Macedonia (47%), Albania (46%), Serbia (44%), Bosnia and Hercegovina (39%) and Montenegro (35%).

**Figure 18: To what extent are you afraid of your children or young relatives and friends being radicalised in the online sphere?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



In conclusion, respondents from Montenegro are least concerned with online radicalisation, in comparison to Kosovo\* where only 9% are not afraid at all.

### B.2. ORGANISED CRIME

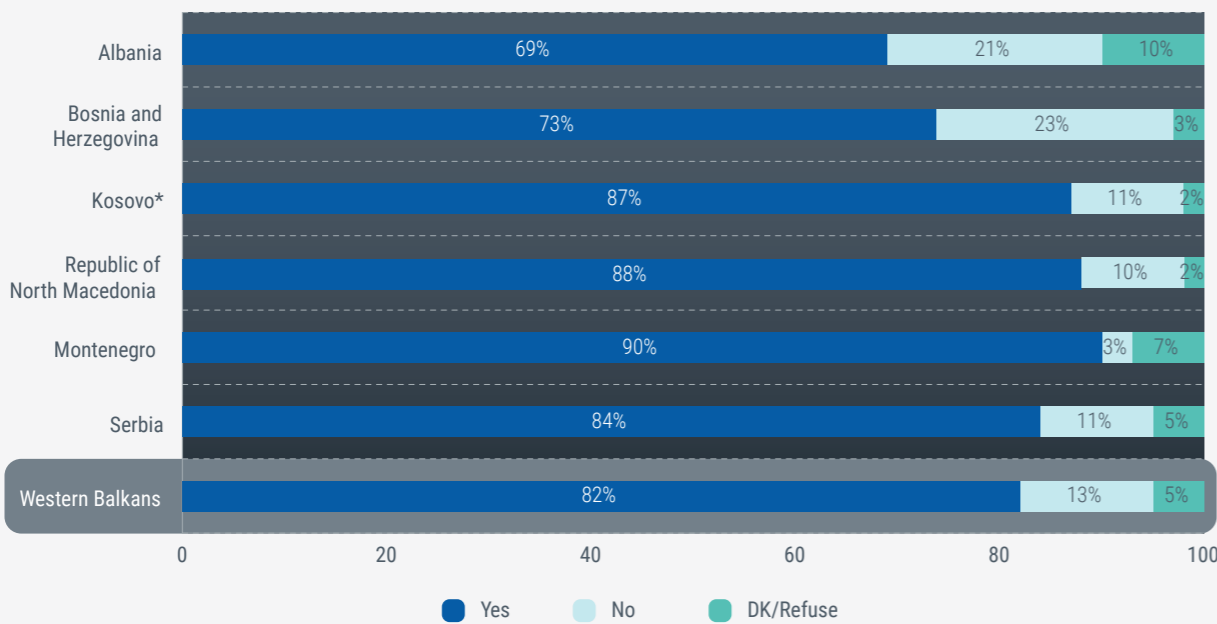
The opinion on the organised crime is generally in line with the findings of the key strategic documents that monitor progress in this area. In this respect, it is no surprise that when asked whether organised crime is considered

a serious threat in the region, 82% of the respondents answered positively, while only 13% do not consider it a threat.

The regional sublimates relies on the individual economies respondents' answers to the same question, with the biggest percentage in Montenegro where nine out of ten people recognise organised crime as a threat on regional level, while only 3% have the opposite opinion. These numbers are almost replicated in the rest of the economies.



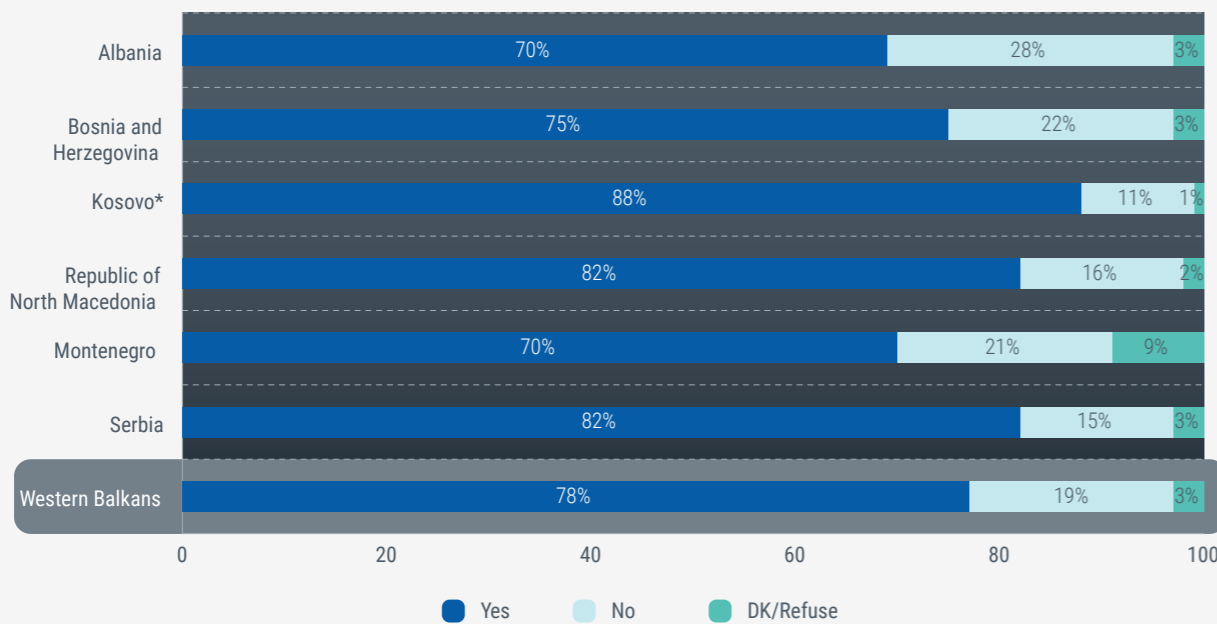
**Figure 19: Is organised crime serious threat in WB6 region?**  
(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



Similar situation is observed when citizens are asked if organised crime is a serious threat in their respective economy, in which case 78% responded affirmatively. The same goes for the individual responses per each of the WB6

economy, with respondents from Kosovo\* being the most worried that organised crime is a serious threat in their economy. This observation is followed by Serbia and North Macedonia (82%).

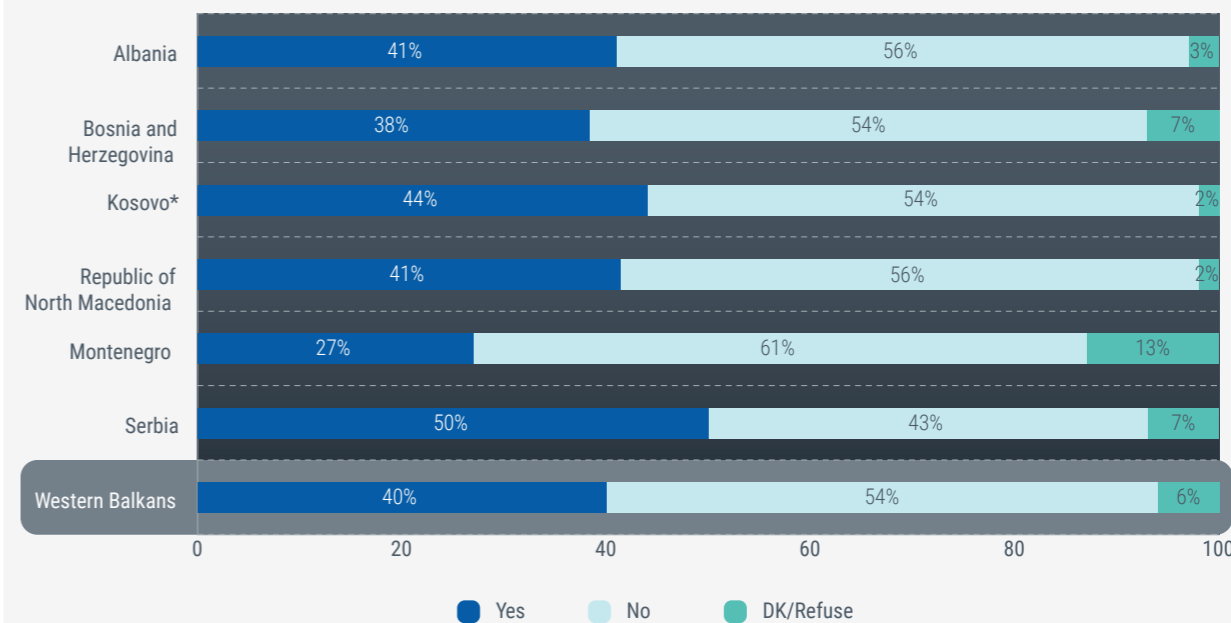
**Figure 20: Is organised crime serious threat in your economy?**  
(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



Regarding the efforts provided by the police and other law enforcement agencies to deal with organised crime, the majority of respondents think that the law enforcement agencies should do more (54%). Interestingly, the most critical are the respondents coming from Montenegro

where two thirds said that government should do more to combat organised crime. On the other hand, the biggest satisfaction of the work done by the police and law enforcement agencies comes from Serbia.

**Figure 21: Do you agree with the following statement: The police and other law enforcement authorities in your economy are doing enough to fight organised crime.**  
(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

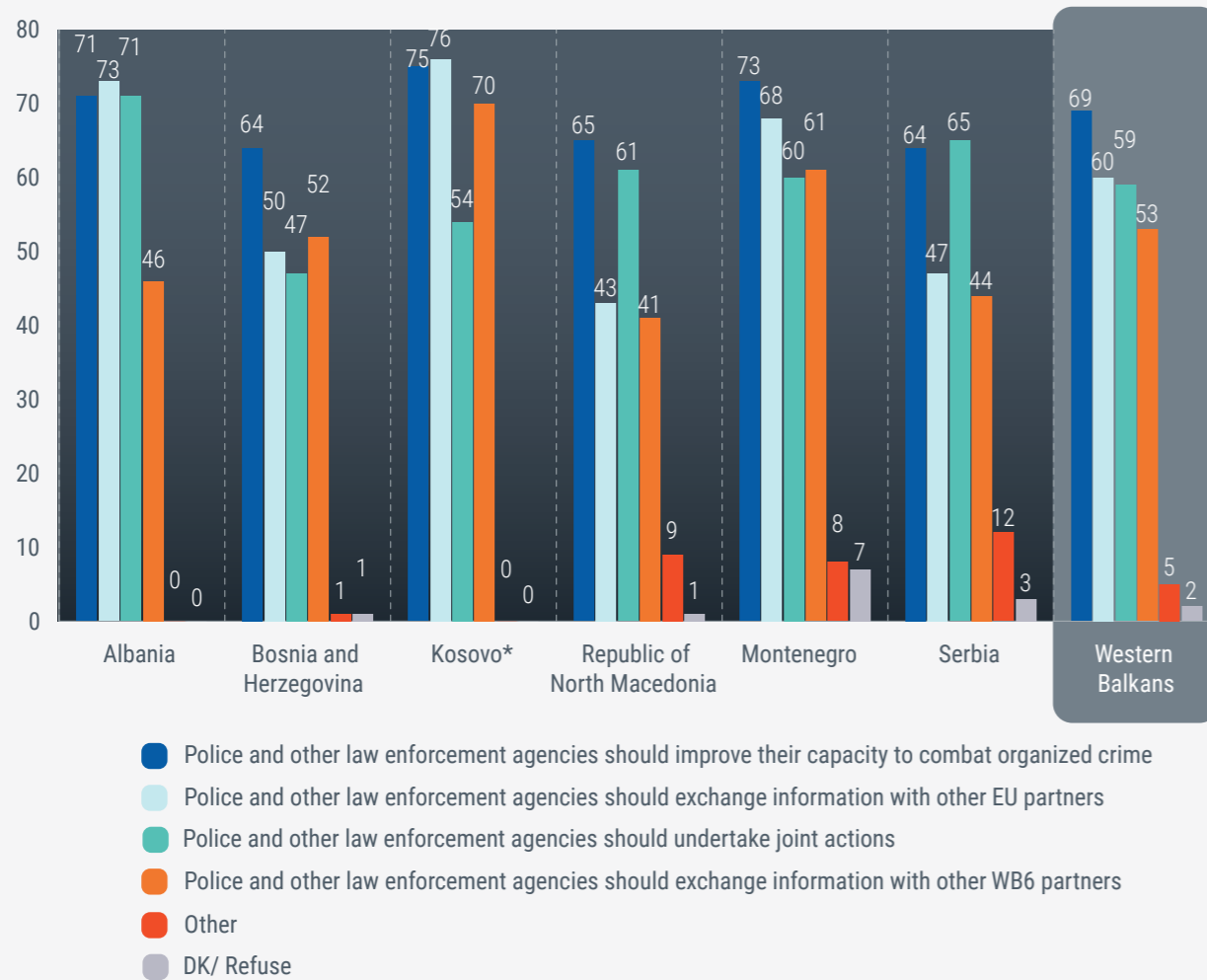


As in the case of terrorism, respondents think that the biggest issue in combating organised crime lies in insufficient capacities of the institutions (almost 70%), followed by a need for the law enforcement agencies to exchange information with EU partners (60%). Individually, there are no big discrepancies in opinions in

the WB economies compared to the regional average, with the exception of Kosovo\* and Albania, where there is slightly greater leaning towards the need to exchange information between their economy and the EU agencies (76% and 73% respectively).

**Figure 22: In your opinion what should the law enforcement authorities be doing in order to fight organised crime more effectively?**

(All respondents with answer No at Q21, N=3246, multiple answer, share of total, %)

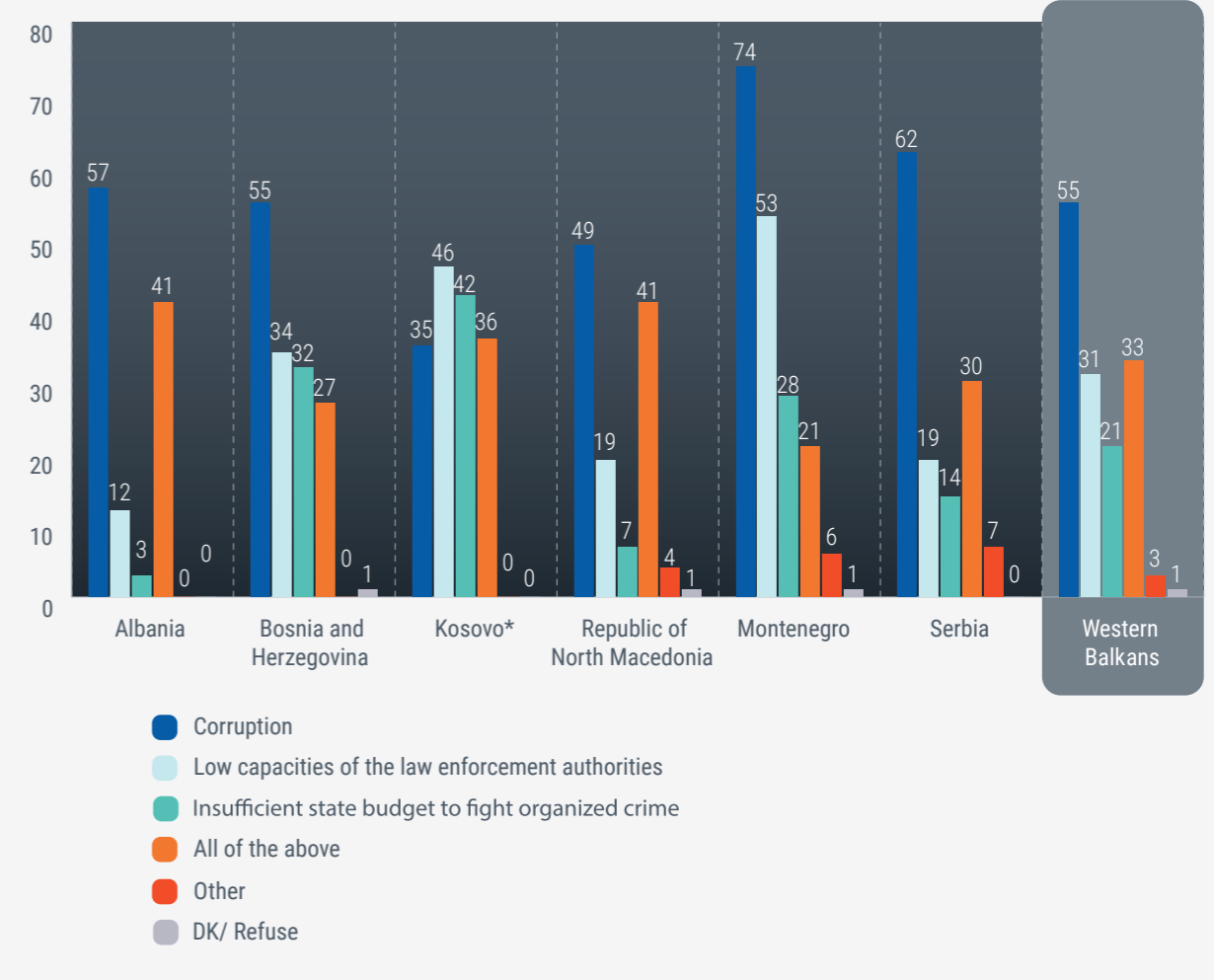


When given three provisional answers regarding the reasons for not fighting organised crime effectively, respondents from the region rated the reasons in the following order: 55% think that the main reason for low performance of institutions in fighting organised crime stems from corruption, low capacities rank second (31%), while insufficient state budget to invest in fighting this security threat comes last. However, one third of the respondents said that all three reasons should be addressed equally in order to have proper results.

On economy level, corruption as the main reason for low performance is considered across all economies, apart from Kosovo\* where the main reason is believed to be low institutional capacities to deal with the threat. The most striking differences in the answers on the individual economy level are the answers in Montenegro, where the corruption is by far the main reason for ineffective work of the law enforcement agencies (74%), followed by Serbia with 62%.

**Figure 23: In your opinion, which are the reasons that your economy is not doing enough to fight organised crime effectively?**

(All respondents with answer No at Q21, N=3246, multiple answers, share of total, %)



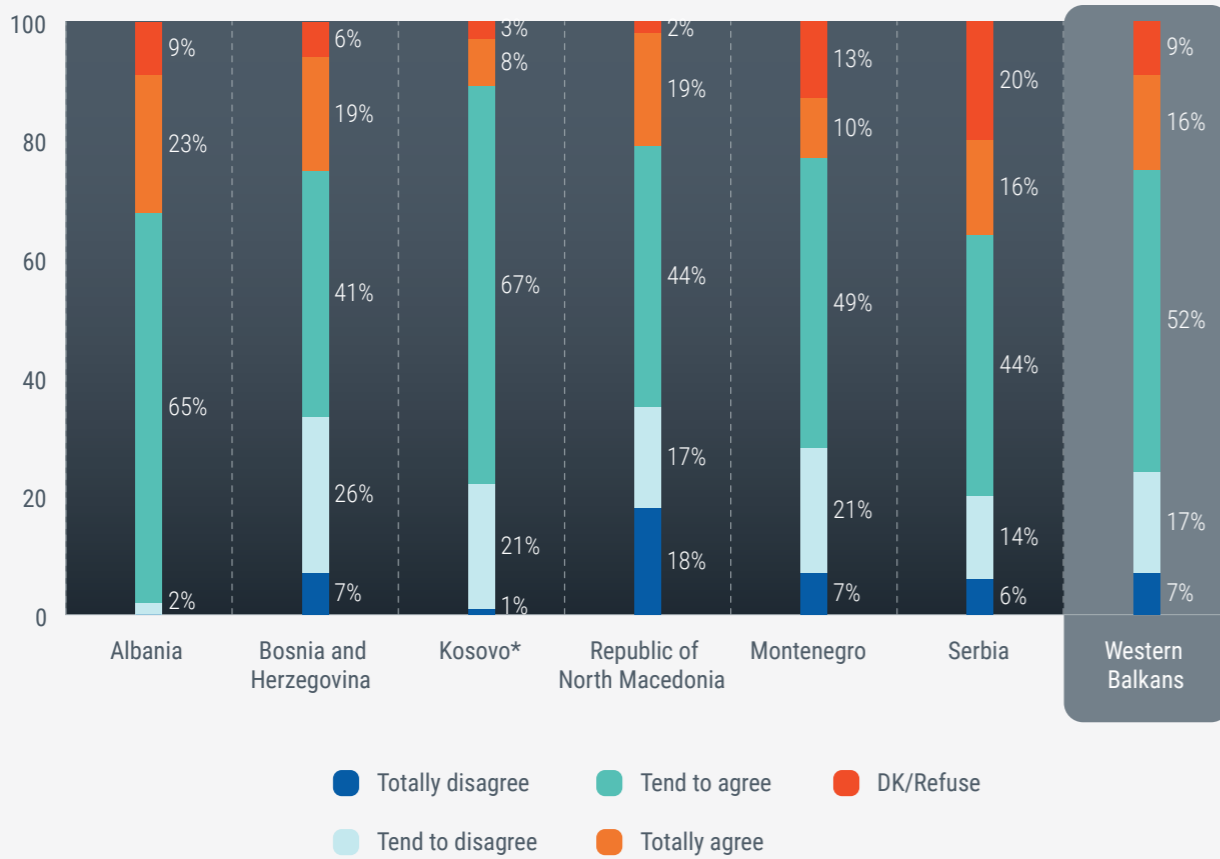
However, when looking into the near future, the optimism that the region has the capacity to deal with the transboundary crime does not seem to be missing. Having in mind that in the last 20 years, WB region has been putting in place different mechanisms for addressing the transboundary crimes, such as the one implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council through the Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) mechanism, the respondents were asked whether they agree with the optimism of such mechanisms that even though challenges are serious, the WB6 have the capacity to successfully deal with

those challenges in near future. The answers resulted in high rate of agreement with this optimism, as more than two thirds (67%) totally agree or tend to agree that the region does have the capacity to deal with these threats, while only one quarter do not agree with this observation.

The biggest supporter to this observation are the respondents from Albania with 88% of the asked population, followed by Kosovo\* (75%), whereas the biggest scepticism is observed in North Macedonia, where 35% do not share the optimism.

**Figure 24: In the last 20 years, the WB region has been putting in place different mechanisms for addressing the transboundary crimes. One of them is the IISG through RCC. The RCC/IISG thinks that even though challenges are serious, the WB6 have the capacity to successfully deal with those challenges in near future. Do you agree with that optimism?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)



### B.3. BORDER SECURITY

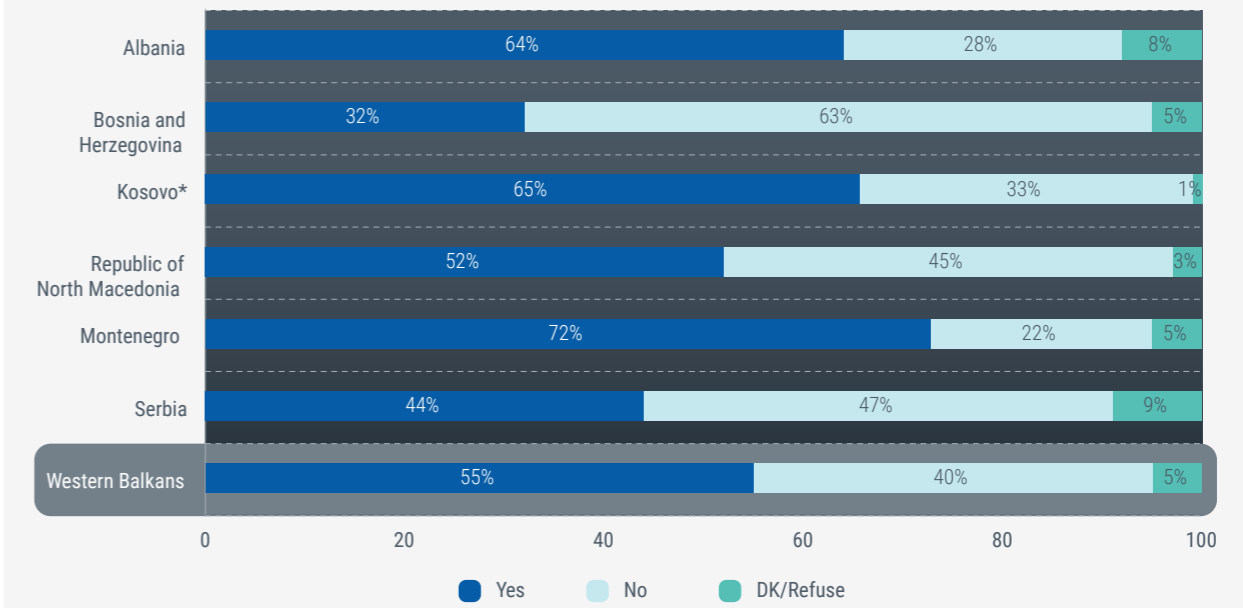
The general perception of the border security issues of the region is mostly positive. More than half of the respondents (55%) on average (regional level) agree that the current level of border security of their economy is sufficient in terms of migration crisis. However, there are some differences between individual economies. In this respect, the most positive responses come from Montenegro, where 72% of the respondents believe that the border authorities are dealing well with the migration crisis, while less than one quarter think that the border management is insufficient in dealing

with the crisis. This positive perception is followed in Kosovo\* with 65% and Albania with 64%. On the other hand, the most negative responses came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where almost two-thirds (63%) think that the border security is insufficient in dealing with migration crisis.

Furthermore, large majority consider that the border security of their economy has been successful in decreasing transnational organised crime (46%), but still higher number of respondents thinks the opposite (48%). The situation is replicated on individual level as well.

**Figure 25: In your opinion, do you think that the current level of border security of your economy is sufficient in terms of efficient migration crisis management?**

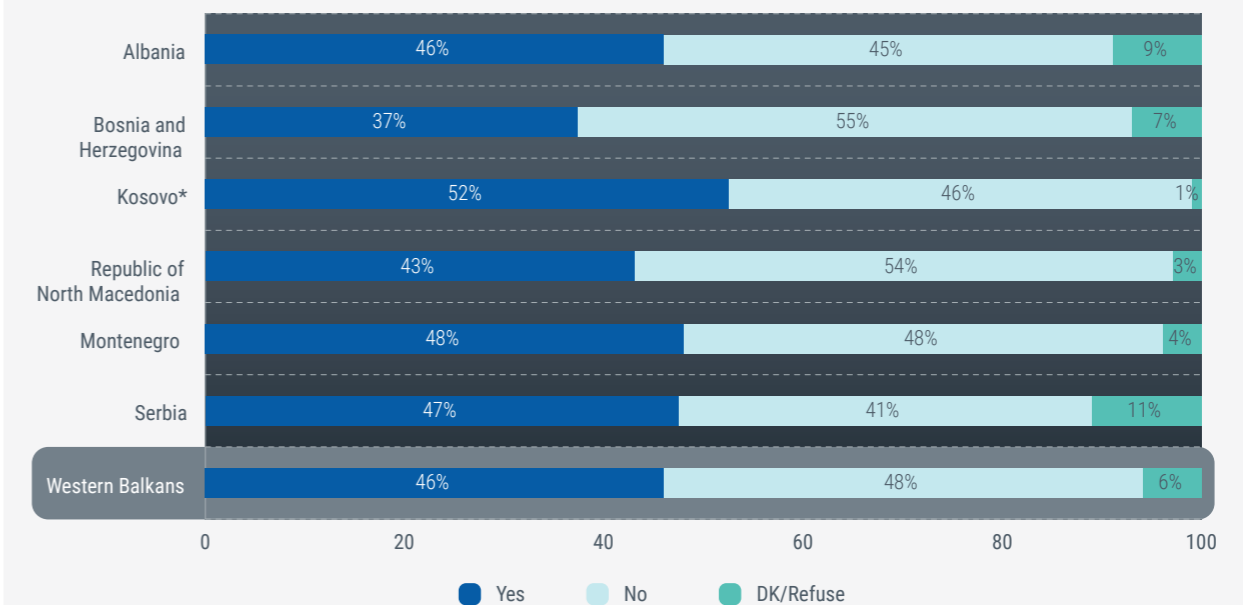
(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



The same trend is observed in Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, border security is sufficient in dealing with transboundary organised crime is higher than the regional average, while in Serbia, Kosovo\* and Albania the percentage of respondents who think that the

**Figure 26: Would you say that the border security of your economy has been successful in curbing transnational organised crime?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



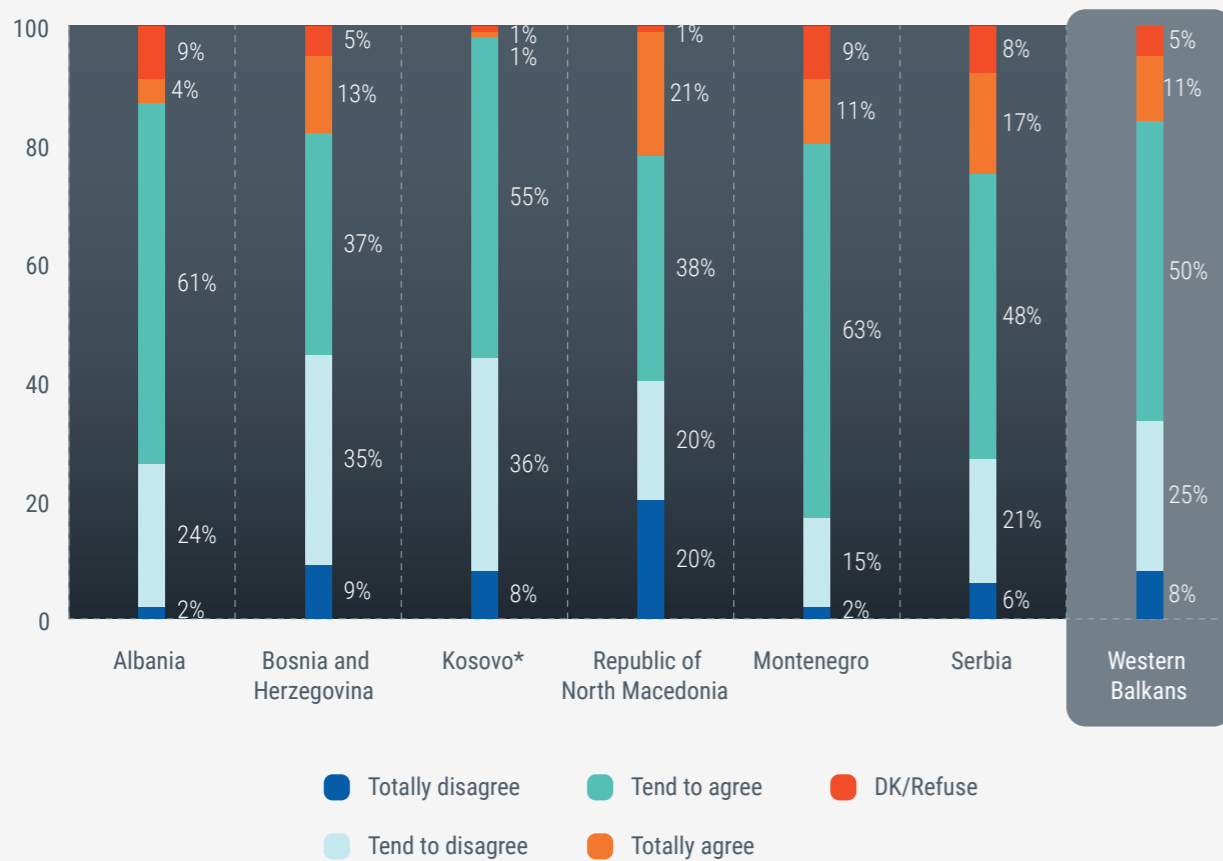
When it comes to future expectations, most people also agree that in the next 12 months border security will be strengthened in a way that contributes to the efforts of dealing with transboundary organised crime. 61% agree (11% totally agree and 50% tend to agree) with this statement, while one-third disagree. The opinion per individual economy varies throughout the region. Again the most optimistic opinion is observed in Montenegro, followed by Albania, with 74% and 65%, respectively, believing that

the border security will be improved in the next year. The lowest negative rate of disagreement with this statement (17%) is observed in Montenegro.

On the other hand, the biggest scepticism is recorded in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Kosovo\*, where 44% of the interviewed population do not think that the border security will be strengthened as to properly address the transboundary organised crime activities.

**Figure 27: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I anticipate that border security of economy will in the next 12 months be strengthened in a way that contributes to the efforts of curbing various forms of transnational crime.**

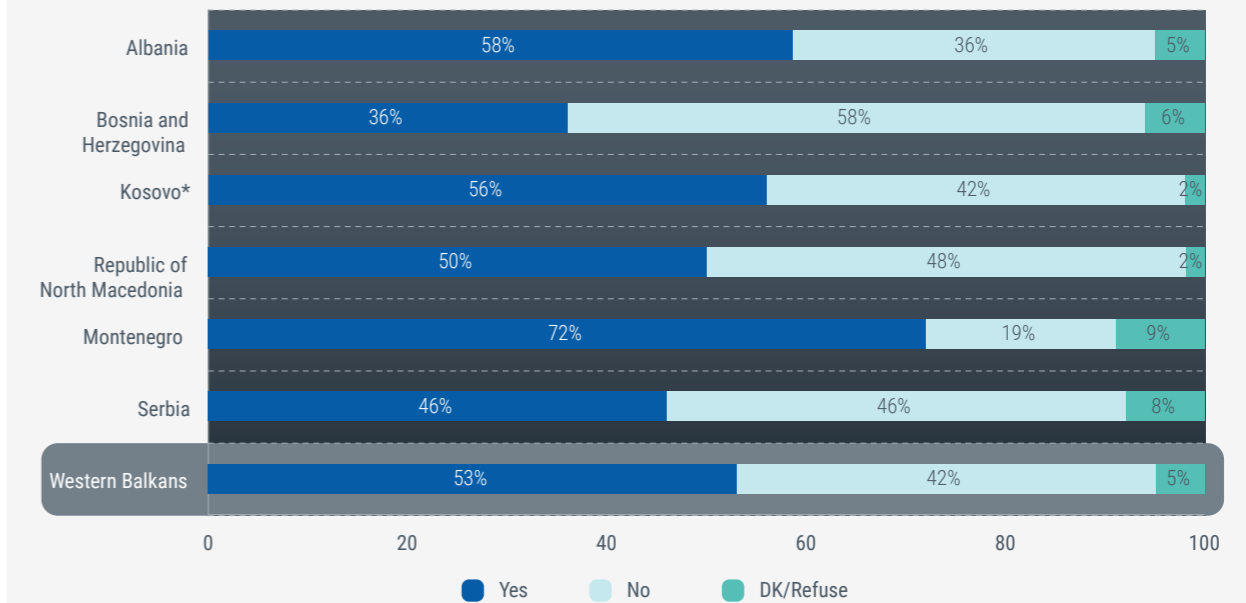
(All respondents, N=6046, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)



When it comes to law enforcement institutions and their work in fighting illegal migration, the majority of population (53%) think that law enforcement agencies are doing enough in fighting illegal migration. Again the biggest support to this opinion is observed in

Montenegro (72%) and Albania (58%), while the biggest disagreement with this statement is observed in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where only 36% of the population agree that the official government institutions are doing enough to deal with this security threat.

**Figure 28: Do you agree with the following statement: The police and other law enforcement authorities in your economy are doing enough to fight illegal migration.**  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

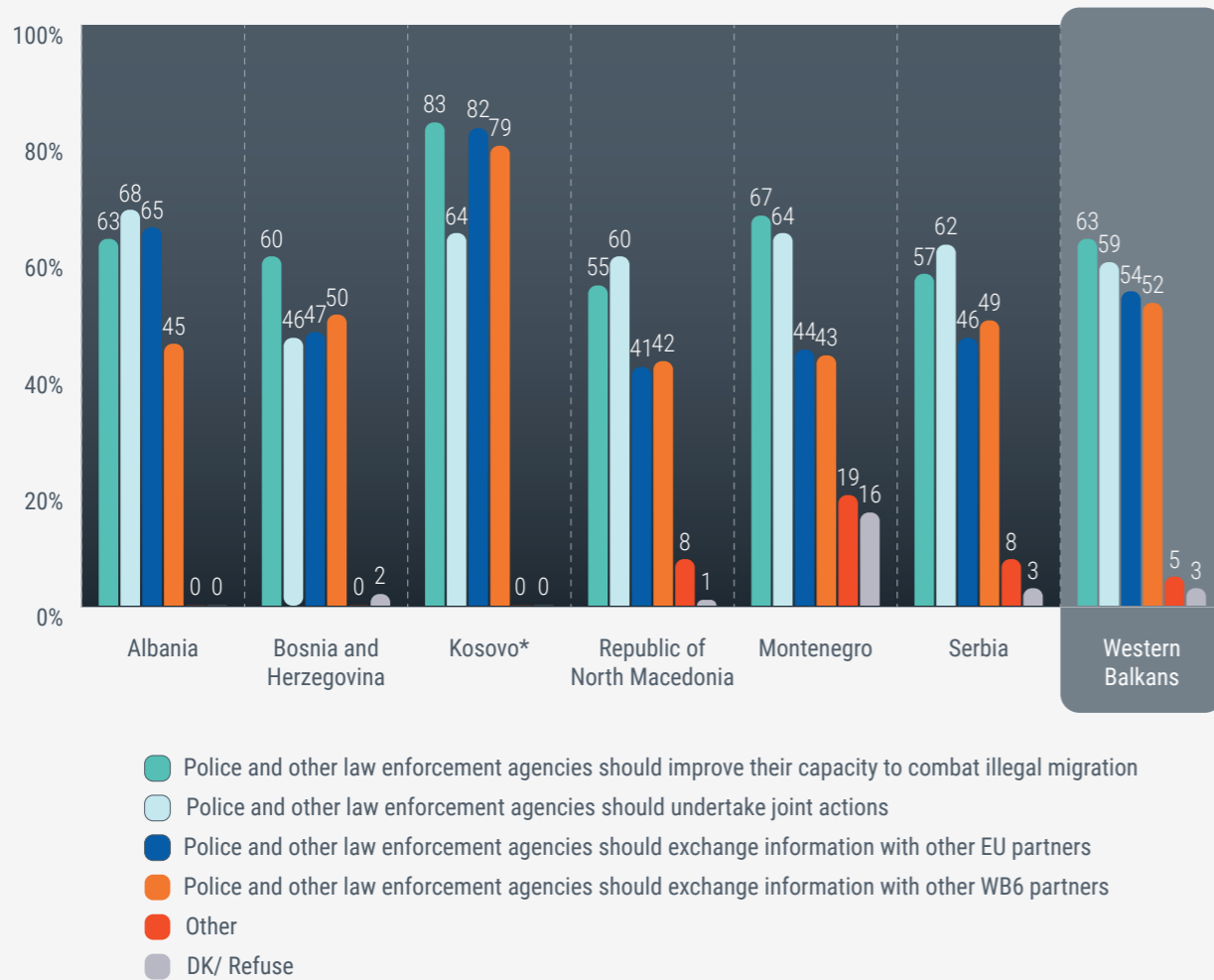


The region believes that the main focus of the law enforcement agencies should be put on improving their capacities in order to fight illegal migration more effectively. Furthermore, undertaking joint actions among the WB6 economies is considered to be very important in dealing with this issue. The opinion on individual level, however, varies relative to the regional average.

Namely, in Kosovo\*, in addition to improving law enforcement capacities, public opinion points out that the law enforcement agencies should focus on exchanging information with EU agencies, rather than focusing on joint actions, which is a completely different opinion from the one observed in Albania, where the main focus is put on the need for joint actions (see figure 29).

**Figure 29: In your opinion what should the law enforcement authorities be doing in order to fight illegal migration more effectively?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



### C. PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE, OWNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY SAFETY RELATED TO FIREARMS

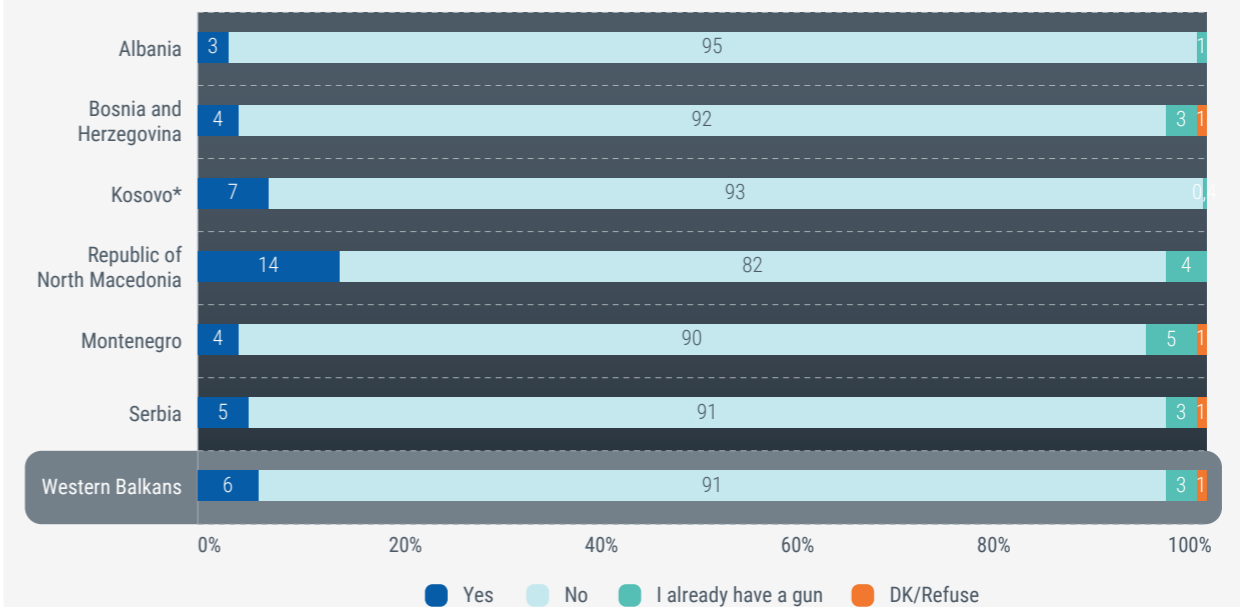
The survey indicates that gun ownership is not an attractive option for the Western Balkans citizens, with only 6% on regional average of those who would consider owning a gun, compared to the overwhelming 91% of those who would not. That is compared to 15 and 80 per cent, respectively, when the same question was posed to the respondents in the Balkan

Barometer 2020 Survey. Therefore, we may note a decline in attractiveness of gun ownership, which, at least as far as it is reported in this survey is low.

The situation does not vary significantly across the region. When it comes to considering gun ownership, only Kosovo\* (7%) and North Macedonia (14%) surpass the regional average. Of those who confirmed owning a gun, North Macedonia and Montenegro go beyond the regional average, but the numbers remain very low, at 4% and 5% respectively.

**Figure 30: Would you consider owning a gun?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



Statistically, there is a difference between men and women on this question: 96% of women, but 85% of men would not consider owning a gun, whereas 3% of women would consider it, compared to 9% of men. Gun ownership among respondents is also more common for men (5%) than for women (1%) according to this survey<sup>5</sup>. Although these values do not dramatically shift the overall picture, the gender aspect appears to play a notable role when it comes to gun ownership, and consequently to firearm-related policies.

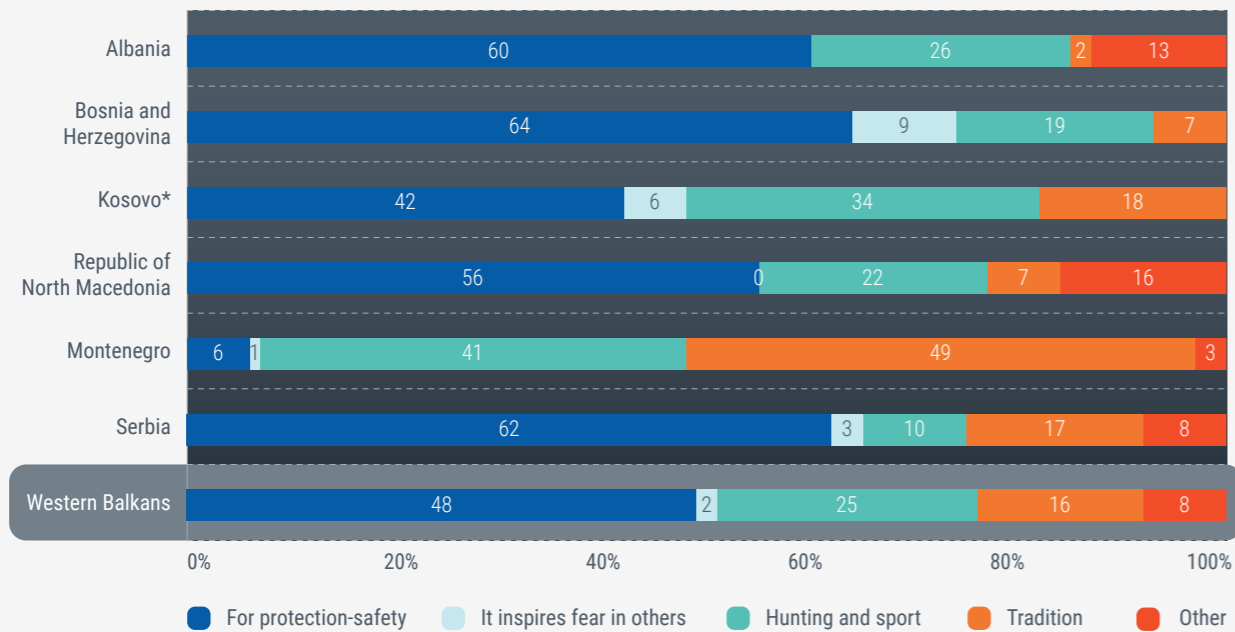
The main reason to own a gun according to most respondents in Western Balkans (48%) would be for protection and safety, followed at some distance by hunting and sport (25%). Tradition and inspiring fear in others seem to be less convincing reasons, at 16 and 2 per cent respectively.

<sup>5</sup> In additional surveys, such as the one conducted by South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), men are almost 40 times more likely to have a gun than women (<https://www.seesac.org/SALW-Control/>)



**Figure 31: What would be / is the main reason for you to own a gun?**

(All respondents with answer Yes and I already have a gun at Q24, N=538, single answer, share of total, %)



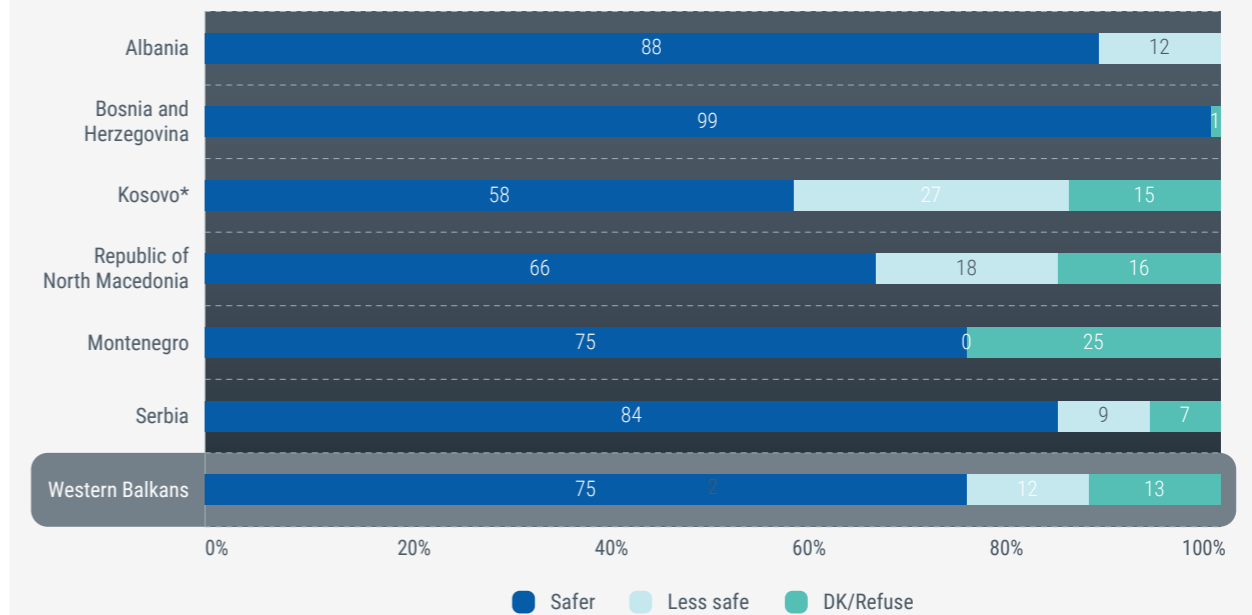
On this question, however, there are notable differences from the regional average across the economies. For example, while regionally most favoured option for almost two thirds of respondents in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, only 6% of respondents from Montenegro would own a gun for the reasons of safety and protection. Instead, close to a half would do so as part of the tradition, compared to less than a fifth respondents from other economies who would own a gun for that reason. It is worth mentioning that hunting

presents an even more common reason for gun ownership than tradition.

Among the few respondents (9%) across the region reporting that they would consider owning a gun or that they already have a gun, 75% of them feel or would feel safer if there was a gun in their household, compared to 12% who would feel less safe. In this category, while there are some differences across economies, in all cases at least over half of respondents would feel safer.

**Figure 32: Would / Does having a gun at home make you feel: safer or less safer?**

(All respondents with answer Yes and I already have a gun at Q24, N=538, single answer, share of total, %)



There are again gender discrepancies to be noted among the same category of respondents who would consider owning a gun or who already have a gun: 66% of women, compared to 78% of men would feel safer with a gun in the household; whereas 19% of women and 10% of men would feel less safe. This data suggests that women are more likely than men to perceive household gun ownership not as protection, but as a potential threat.

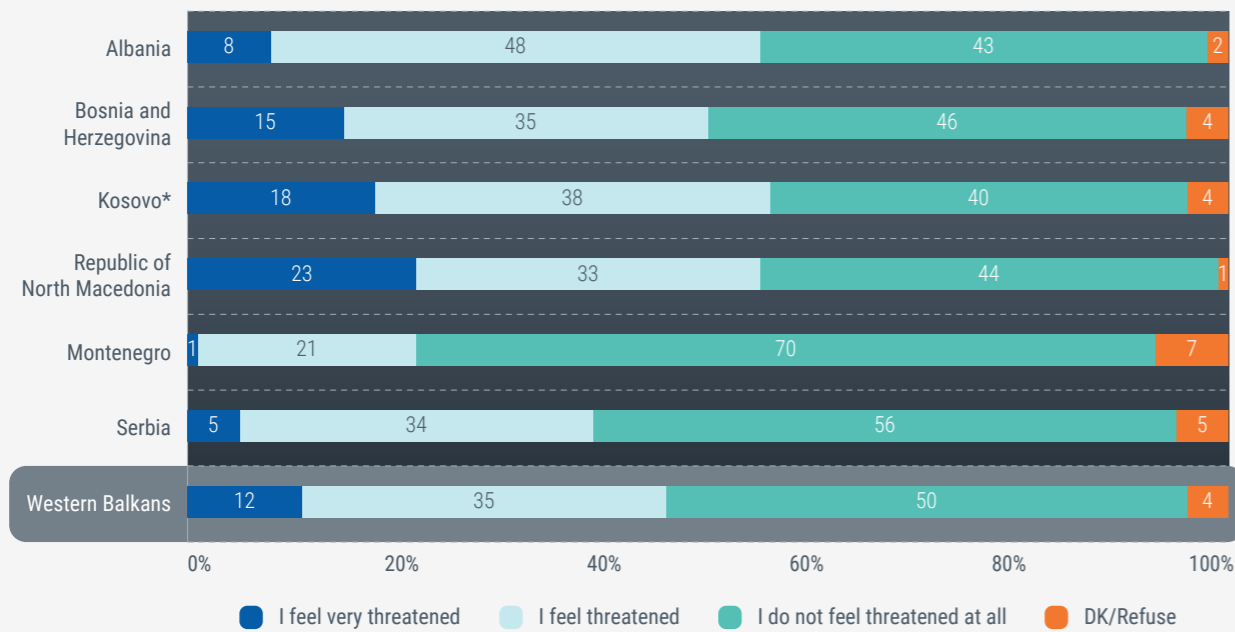
On average, 47% of respondents feel threatened or very threatened by the illegal possession and misuse of weapons in their neighbourhoods, and 50% do not feel threatened at all. This

indicates a minor increase of respondents who feel threatened or very threatened by the illegal possession and misuse of weapons in their neighbourhoods compared to Barometer 2020 Survey, when this sentiment was shared by 46% of respondents.

The highest sense of security appears to be among respondents from Montenegro and Serbia, where 70% and 61% of respondents respectively, do not feel threatened at all. On the other hand, at least half of respondents from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\* are likely to feel at least somewhat threatened.

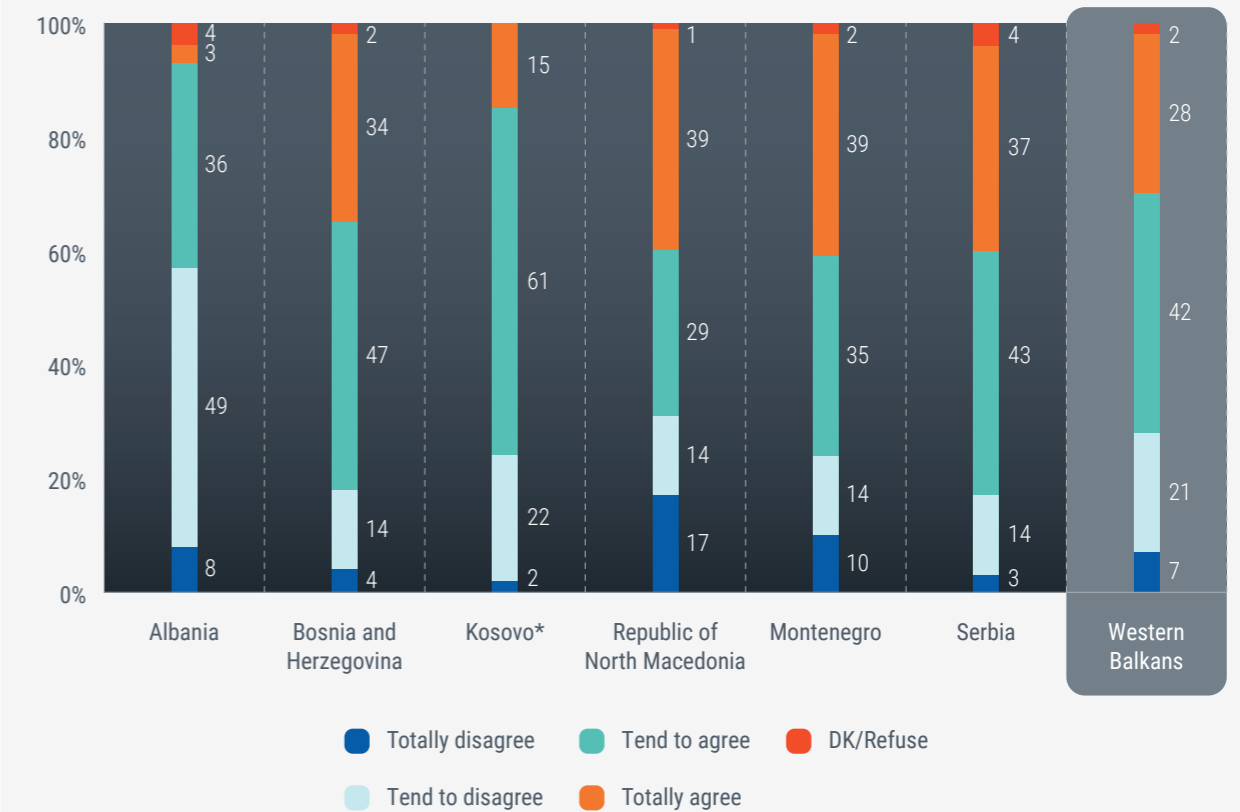
**Figure 33: How threatened do you feel by the illegal possession and misuse of weapons in your neighbourhood (as in crime, domestic violence, celebratory shooting, etc.)**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



**Figure 34: Do you agree that migrants entering your economy increase security risks for economy?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)



### D. PERCEPTIONS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATIONS, ASYLUM SEEKING AND HUMANITARIAN DIMENSION OF MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS

Looking at the average for the Western Balkans, an overwhelming majority of respondents (70%) believe that the migrants entering the respondents' respective economy increase the security risks for their economy. Less than a third disagree with that sentiment. It is also notable that only 2% do not have or refused to express their opinion, indicating that the

question is a highly polarising one, with almost all respondents having a clear stand on the issue.

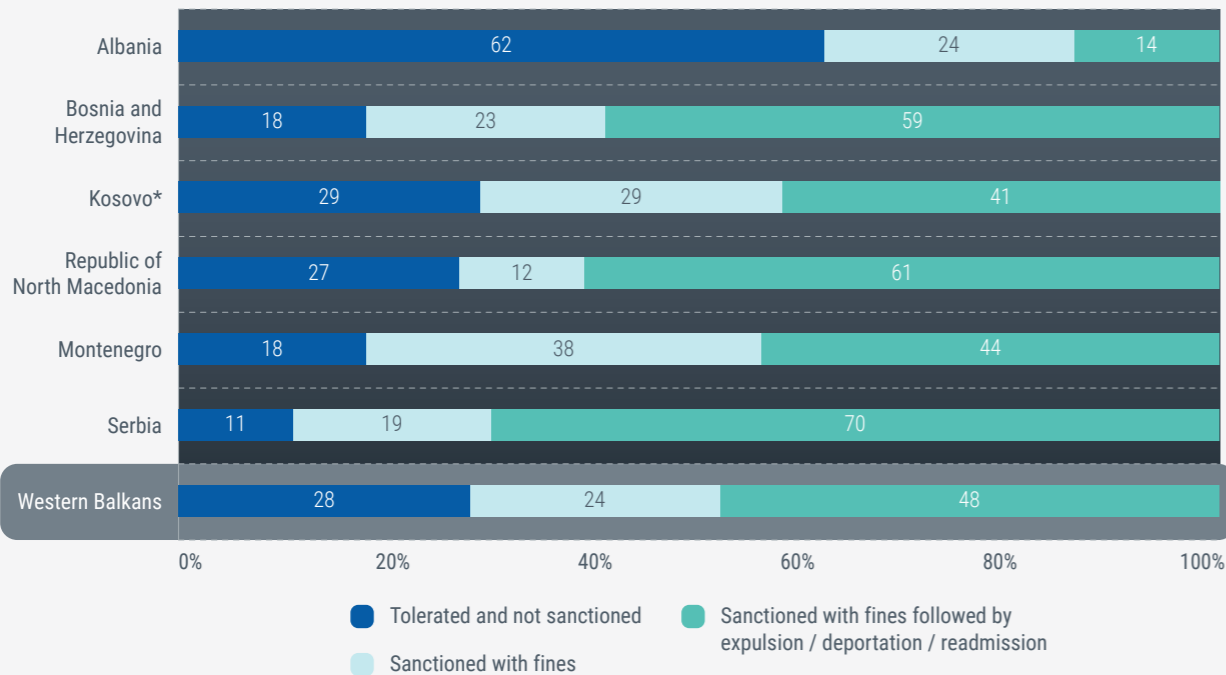
Nevertheless, the sentiment is not uniform throughout the region, with Albania dodging the overall trend. Whereas four-fifths or more of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia associate illegal migration with increased security risks to their economies (81 and 80 per cent respectively), and over two-thirds in North Macedonia (68%), Montenegro (74%) and Kosovo\* (76%), in Albania those not seeing a correlation between immigrants and security risks outnumber those who do (57 to 39 per cent respectively).

Albania is also the only economy where most respondents – close to two thirds – believe that illegal border crossings of migrants who have not committed other criminal offences should be tolerated and not sanctioned. 38% would consider sanctions appropriate, either in terms of fines or expulsions. On the other hand, the reverse is true for other regional

economies, where preference for any kind of sanctions outweighs preference for tolerating such illegal crossings without sanctions. Likewise, as opposed to the findings in Albania, respondents from all other economies would in those situations consider fines followed by expulsions a more appropriate response than fines alone.

**Figure 35: Illegal migrants violate immigration regulations of the host country because they have crossed the borders illegally and without permission and legitimising documents. If the illegal migrants have not committed other criminal offences, do you think that illegal border crossing as such should be: (a) tolerated and not sanctioned, (b) sanctioned with fines, or (c) sanctioned with fines followed by exclusion/deportation/readmission?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

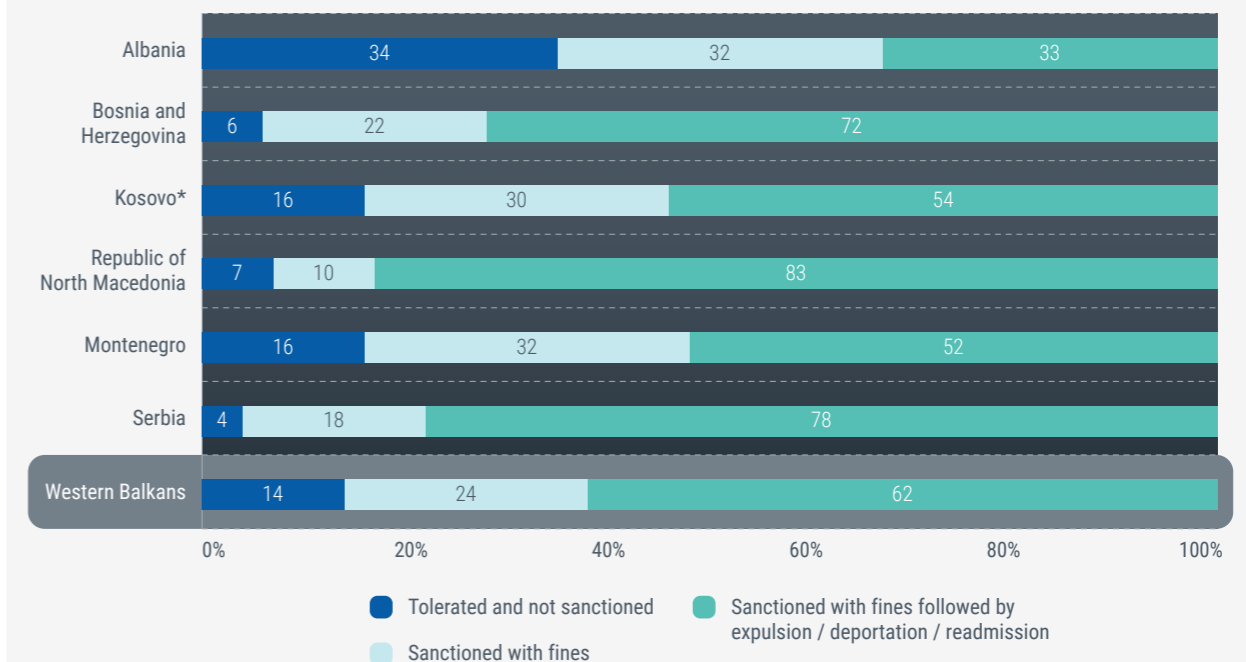


Sanctions resulting in expulsion become even more attractive to respondents when it comes to a situation where illegal migrants violate laws of the host country, use false or falsified documents or present false declarations. On a regional level, 62% of respondents would in that case favour fines followed by expulsions, whereas only 14% would tolerate the offence without sanctions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina,

North Macedonia and Serbia over two thirds would opt for the former option, more than a half in Kosovo\* and Montenegro, whereas respondents from Albania once again demonstrate a more lenient attitude – with a third of respondents each answering in favour of no sanctions, fines, and fines followed by expulsion respectively.

**Figure 36: Illegal migrants violate laws of the host country, if false or falsified documents are used or false declarations are presented. Do you think that any of these legal violations should be: (i) tolerated and not sanctioned, (ii) sanctioned with fines, or (iii) sanctioned with fines followed by exclusion/deportation/readmission?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

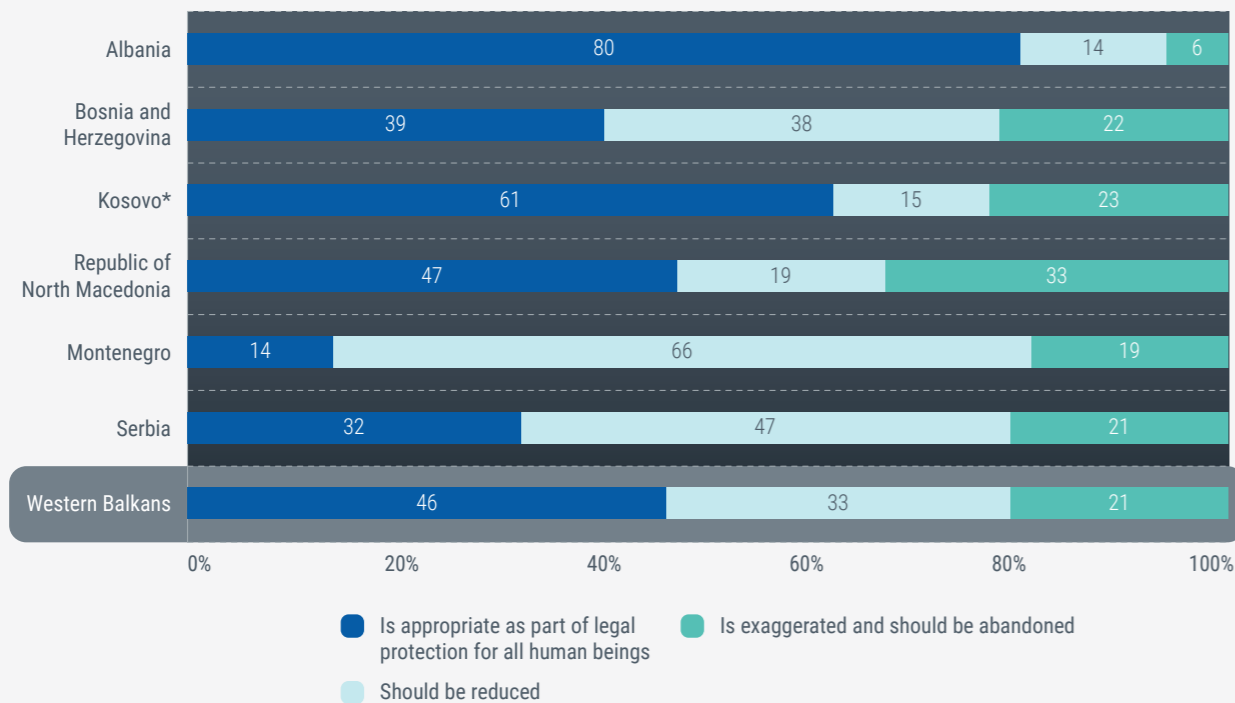


Opinions are divided across the region and within the national cohorts when it comes to the cost-free legal aid provided by the host economy to the illegal migrants who qualify for it. Respondents from Albania and Kosovo\* mostly consider it appropriate as part of legal protection (80 and 61 per cent respectively), while half or more of respondents from other

economies believe it should be either reduced or abandoned, with varying levels of support for each option. Montenegrin respondents stand out as the most sceptical regarding the appropriateness of such legal aid, but are also least likely – with the exception of their counterparts from Albania – to favour its total abandonment.

**Figure 37: International conventions give illegal migrants the same access to the judicial system (and Courts) as the local population. If illegal migrants qualify for it, they get cost-free legal aid from the host country. Do you think that this access to justice: (i) is appropriate as part of legal protection for all human beings, (ii) should be reduced, or (iii) is exaggerated and should be abandoned?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

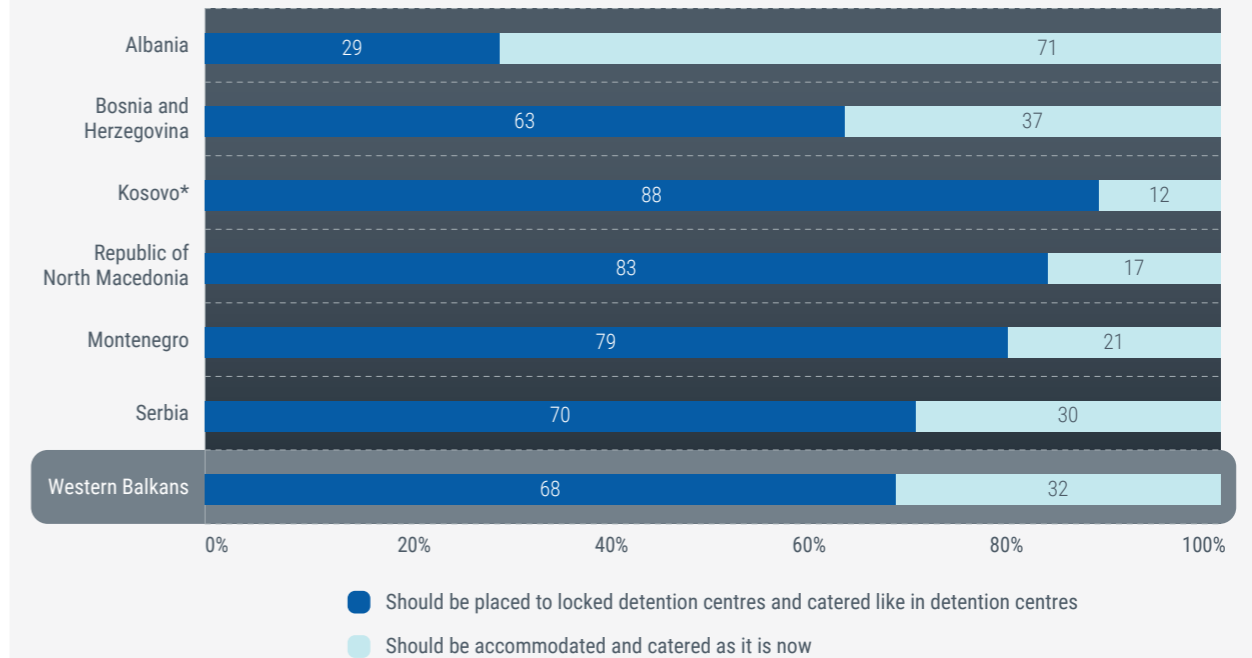


When it comes to the placement of illegal migrants in the host economy, over two thirds of regional respondents – 68% - believe they should be placed in locked detention centres and catered accordingly, whereas less than a third – 32% - agree with the sometimes-used practice of accommodating illegal migrants at hotels and catering them at the host economy costs. The regional average reflects the opinion of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina

– which is interesting, given that that is where illegal migrants are most associated with potential security threats – whereas the opinion in other economies is more sharply divided: in Albania, in favour of hotel accommodation and catering, and elsewhere in favour of locked detention centres. The latter sentiment is particularly emphasised in Kosovo\*, where this opinion is shared by 88% of respondents.

**Figure 38: Illegal migrants are accommodated and catered by a host country as long as they are on its territory. Quite many illegal migrants are even accommodated at hotels and catered from hotels on a host country's costs. Do you think that illegal migrants: (i) should be placed to locked detention centres and catered like in detention centres or (ii) should be accommodated and catered as it is now?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

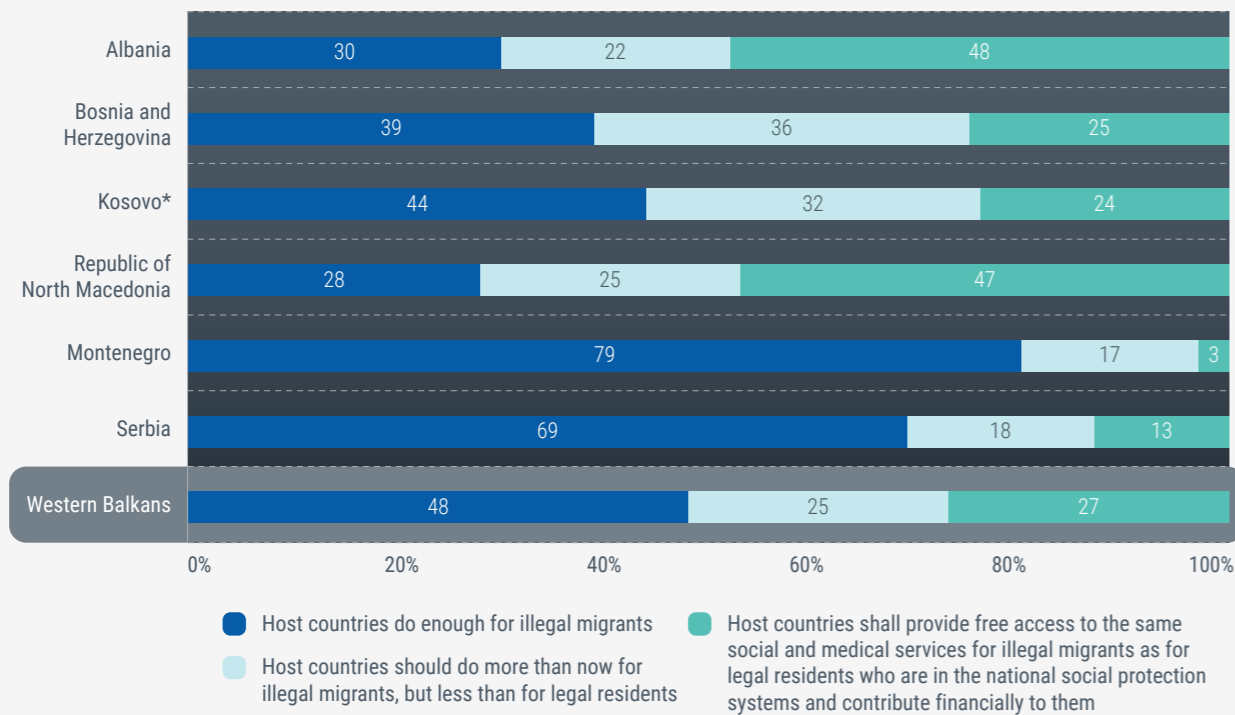


In terms of the care provided by the host economy to the 'vulnerable groups' amongst the illegal migrants, at a regional average a little less than half of respondents believe that the host economy is doing enough, and about a fourth believe that their host economy should either do more for illegal migrants, albeit less than for legal residents, or provide same free access as is enjoyed by legal residents. Montenegro and Serbia stand out as the most convinced that their economies

are already doing enough, at 79 and 69 per cent, respectively. On the other hand, in other economies this opinion is shared by less than half of respondents, being the lowest in Albania (30%) and North Macedonia (28%). The latter two are also the only ones where the opinion prevails (close to half of respondents) that the host economy should provide free access to the same social and medical services for illegal migrants as it does for legal residents.

**Figure 39: Illegal migrants also consist of "vulnerable" groups like minors, women, people with special needs, including sick people. Do you think that:**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

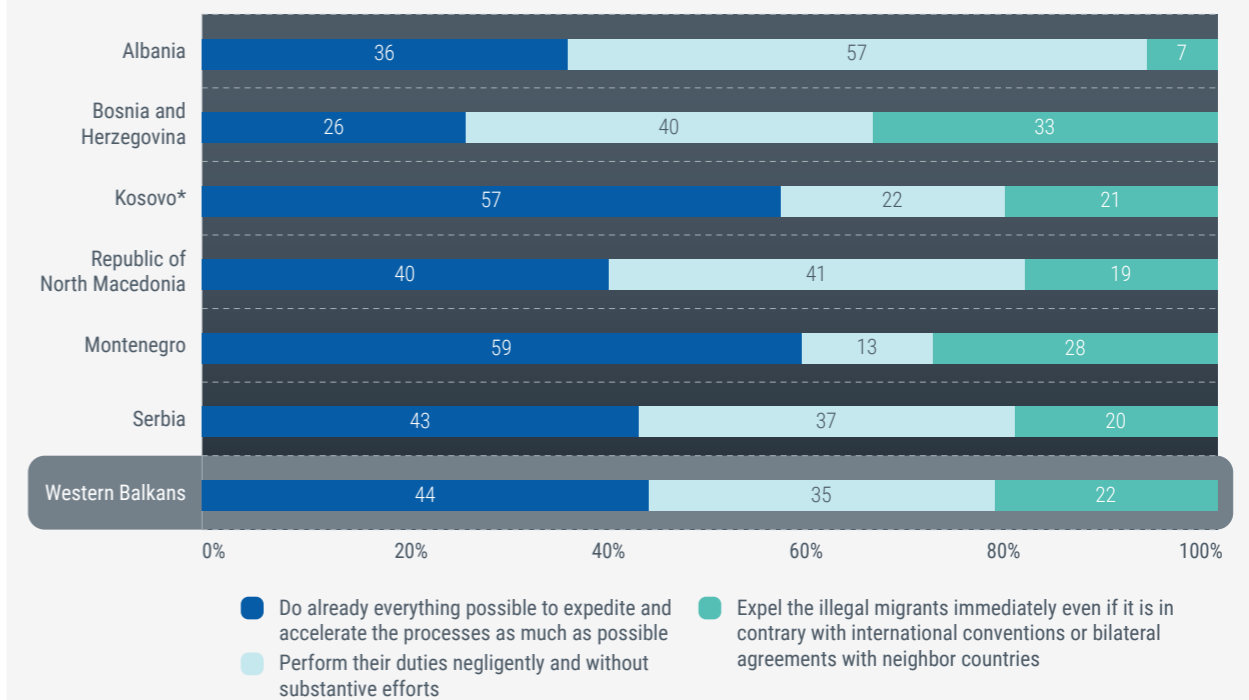


Regarding the governmental administrations and the judiciary, the greatest percentage of respondents in the region believes that they are doing everything possible to expedite and accelerate the processes concerning illegal migrants. Nevertheless, such trust is still shared by less than half of respondents, 44% - the rest believe that governmental administrations and the judiciary are either negligent with their duties (35%) or may act contrary to international conventions or bilateral agreements (22%). The trust in institutions in that sense is highest in Kosovo\* and Montenegro (although still at only somewhat over fifty percent), and lowest in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it is shared by less than a third of respondents. Over half of Albanian respondents believe their institutions are being negligent, and over a third of Bosnian, Macedonian and Serbian respondents share that sentiment. Albanian respondents are however least likely to believe their institutions would act contrary to international conventions or bilateral agreements, whereas the same is possible for about a third of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro and for about a fourth of respondents from Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Serbia.

**Figure 40: The governmental and judicial procedures to expel or readmit illegal migrants take very long time, sometimes many years. This situation is very expensive and costs a lot of governmental funds. Do you think that the Governmental Administrations and the Judiciary:**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



There are no notable deviations in the opinions regarding the questions related to illegal migrants across gender, age groups or education levels, indicating that none of these variables play a decisive role in shaping the opinions.

economy, being lowest in Albania – at 63% – and highest in Serbia – at 82%. There is also a very small proportion of those who do not have an opinion or refuse to share it, indicating that the awareness on the impact of natural disasters is widespread.

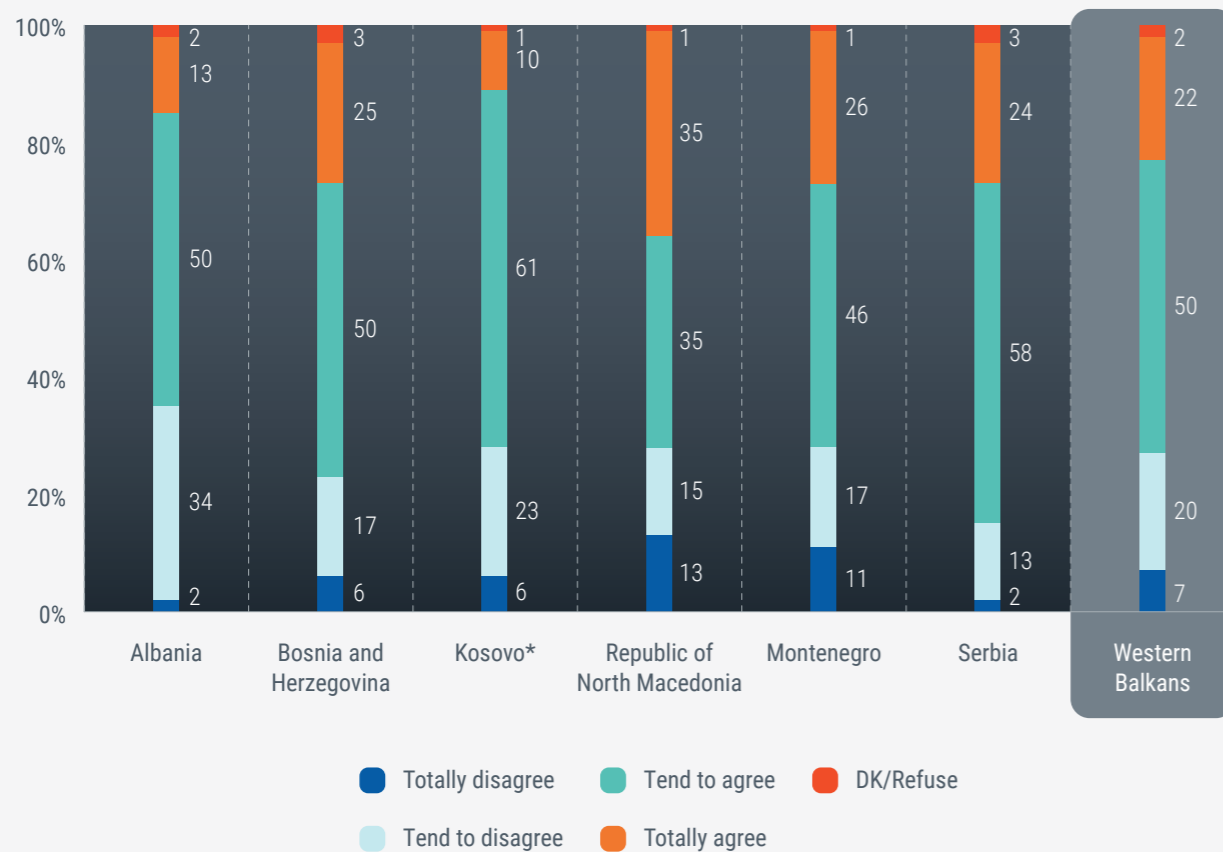
### E. PERCEPTIONS OF DISASTER PREVENTION AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Natural disasters are perceived as a serious security threat by the Western Balkans citizens. 72% or more than two thirds either totally agree or tend to agree with this sentiment. This prevalence holds true for each individual



**Figure 41: To what extent do you agree with the following statements: Natural disasters present a serious security threat to economy.**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

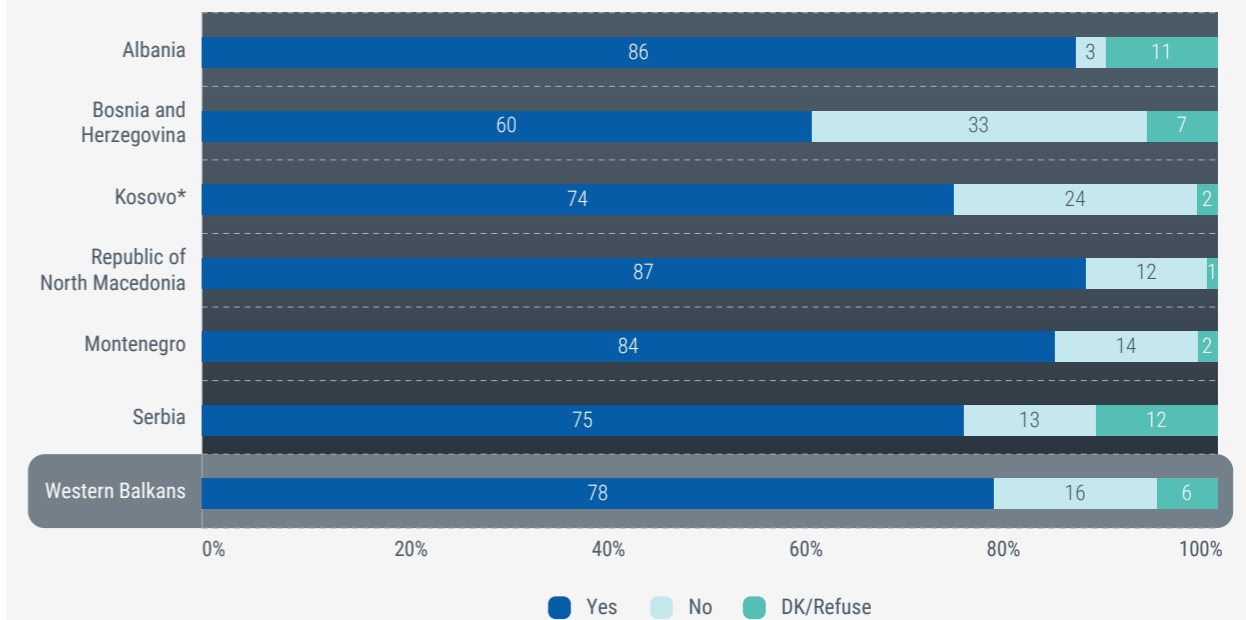


Although a slightly greater hesitation is evident in opinion on the potential benefits of regional cooperation and joint preparedness, with an average 6% of respondents in the region having

not formed an opinion, an overwhelming majority of 78% believe that the region would benefit from cooperation and a joint system for natural disasters, including pandemics.

**Figure 42: In your opinion, do you think that the WB region would benefit from a regional cooperation and joint preparedness system for natural disasters, including pandemics?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



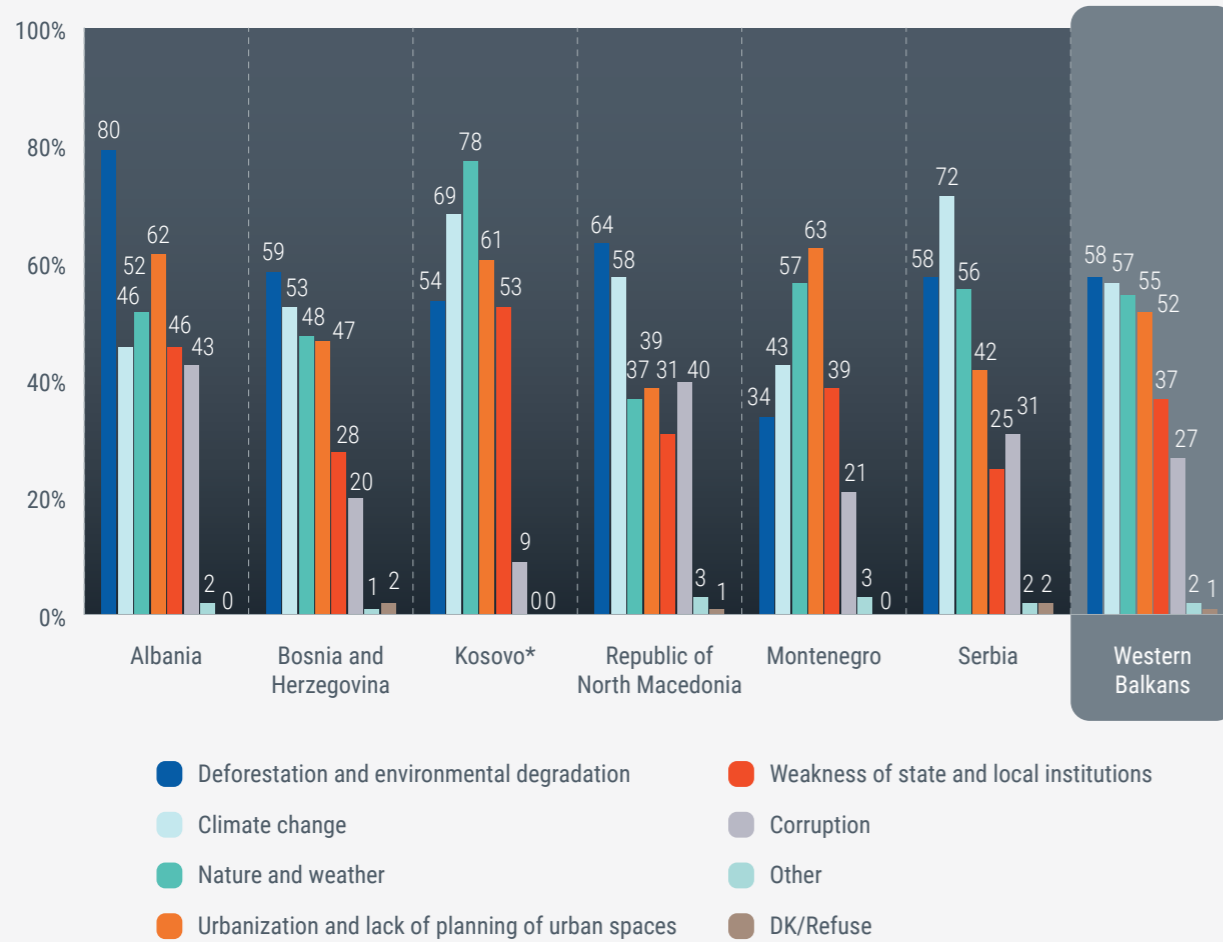
Once again, the same perception prevails in each of the economies, this time being lowest in Bosnia and Herzegovina at 60% and highest in North Macedonia at 87%, followed closely by Albania and Montenegro. Except for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, where 33 and 24 per cent of respondents respectively disagree that regional cooperation could be beneficial in this regard, less than a sixth of respondents in the other four economies share that opinion.

In terms of the underlying factors contributing to the occurrence of natural disasters, climate change, nature and weather, urbanisation and lack of planning of urban spaces, and deforestation and environmental degradation are considered to be the most decisive by WesternBalkanscitizens. Weaknessofstateand local institutions and corruption follow behind them. This indicates that direct interferences

with the natural environment are most blamed for natural disasters. Compared to their peers, Serbia and Kosovo\* are the most concerned with the effects of the climate change; Kosovo\* is most concerned with nature and weather; Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are least concerned with the impact of weak state and local institutions; urbanisation and lack of urban planning are considered a greater problem in Albania, Kosovo\* and Montenegro than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia; Albanian respondents are notably more concerned with deforestation and environmental degradation than others, whereas Montenegrin respondents are least concerned; and Albanians and Macedonians are more than four times as likely to consider corruption a relevant factor than their counterparts in Kosovo\*.

**Figure 43: Which underlying factors do you think contribute most to occurrence of natural disasters?**

(All respondents, N=6046, multiple answers, share of total, %)

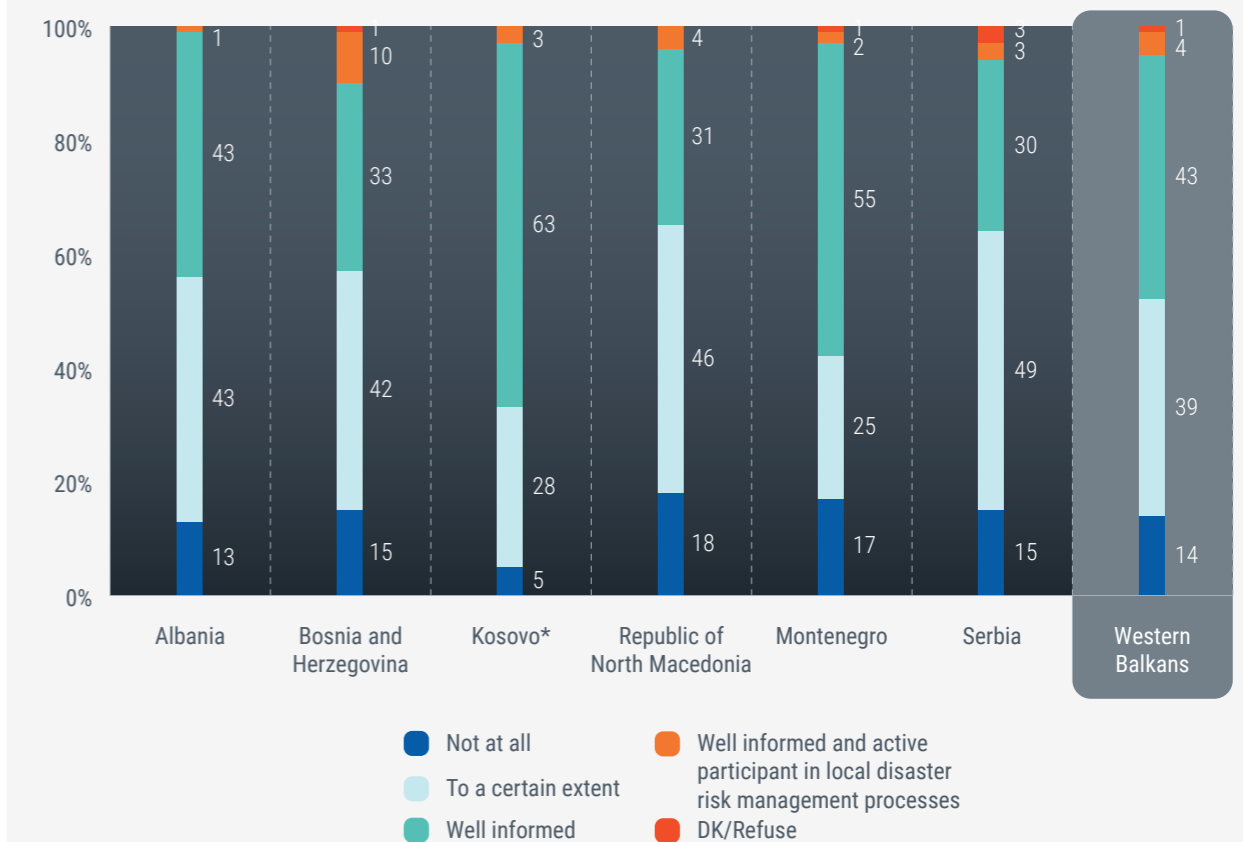


Despite the high level of awareness in terms of the security threat posed by natural disasters, less than half of Western Balkans respondents feel well informed about the main natural disaster risks in their area. This is true for each economy individually, except for Kosovo\* and

Montenegro. There is also an evident low level of active participation in local disaster risk management processes, being highest at 10% among the Bosnian respondents and standing at 4% as a regional average.

**Figure 44: To what extent are you familiarised with the main natural disaster risks in your area?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

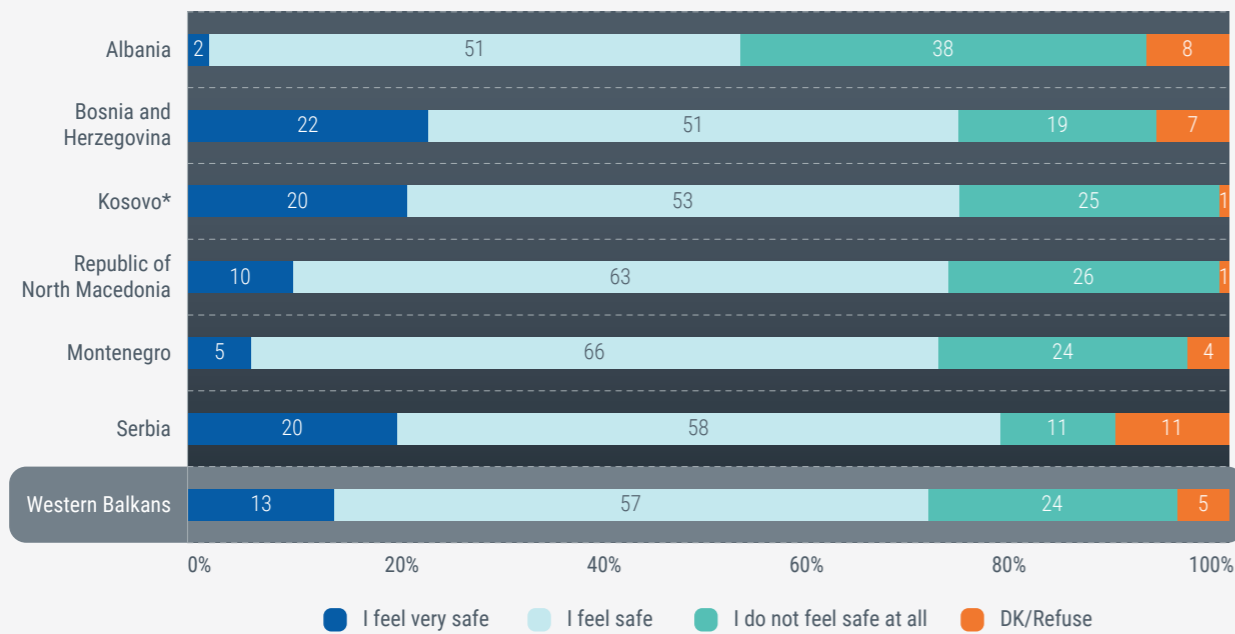


On average, majority of respondents – 69% – from the Western Balkans feel either safe or very safe knowing the response capacities of their local fire and rescue service; but close to a fifth of respondents do not feel safe at all. The

sense of insecurity is the highest in Albania (38%), and lowest in Serbia (11%), with the rest varying between 19 and 26 per cent. Most respondents in each economy, however, feel moderately safe rather than very safe.

**Figure 45: How safe do you feel by knowing the response capacities of your local fire and rescue service?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

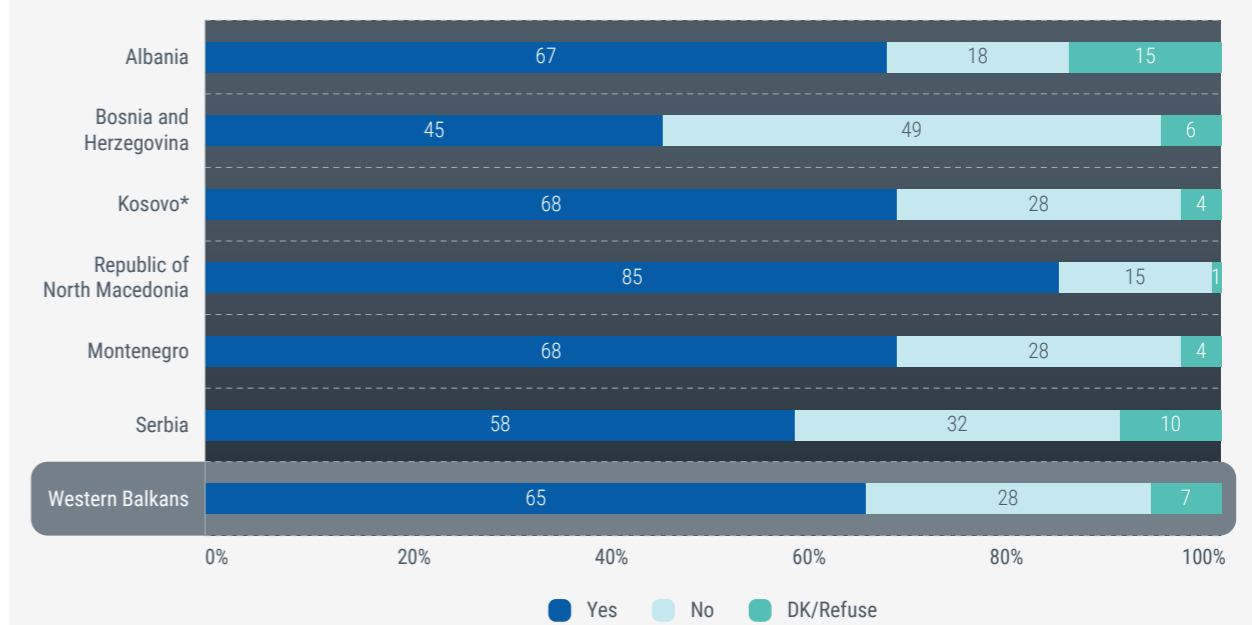


There appears to be a relatively high level of readiness among region's citizens to consider joining community-based voluntary initiatives to increase disaster preparedness – 65% would be in favour, whereas 28% would not consider it. Only in Bosnia and Herzegovina would fewer respondents be willing to join such an initiative

than those who would not, although here as well that preference is not overwhelming. Greatest readiness may be found in North Macedonia, where over four-fifths of respondents would consider joining community-based voluntary initiatives to increase disaster preparedness.

**Figure 46: Would you consider joining community-based voluntary initiatives to increase disaster preparedness?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)



In general and in most cases, there is a high level of shared opinion among Western Balkans citizens regarding natural disasters, disaster preparedness and prevention – on average, large proportions of respondents feel the same way. Moreover, opinions do not vary considerably from economy to economy, indicating that public perceptions on these questions are relatively shared throughout the region.

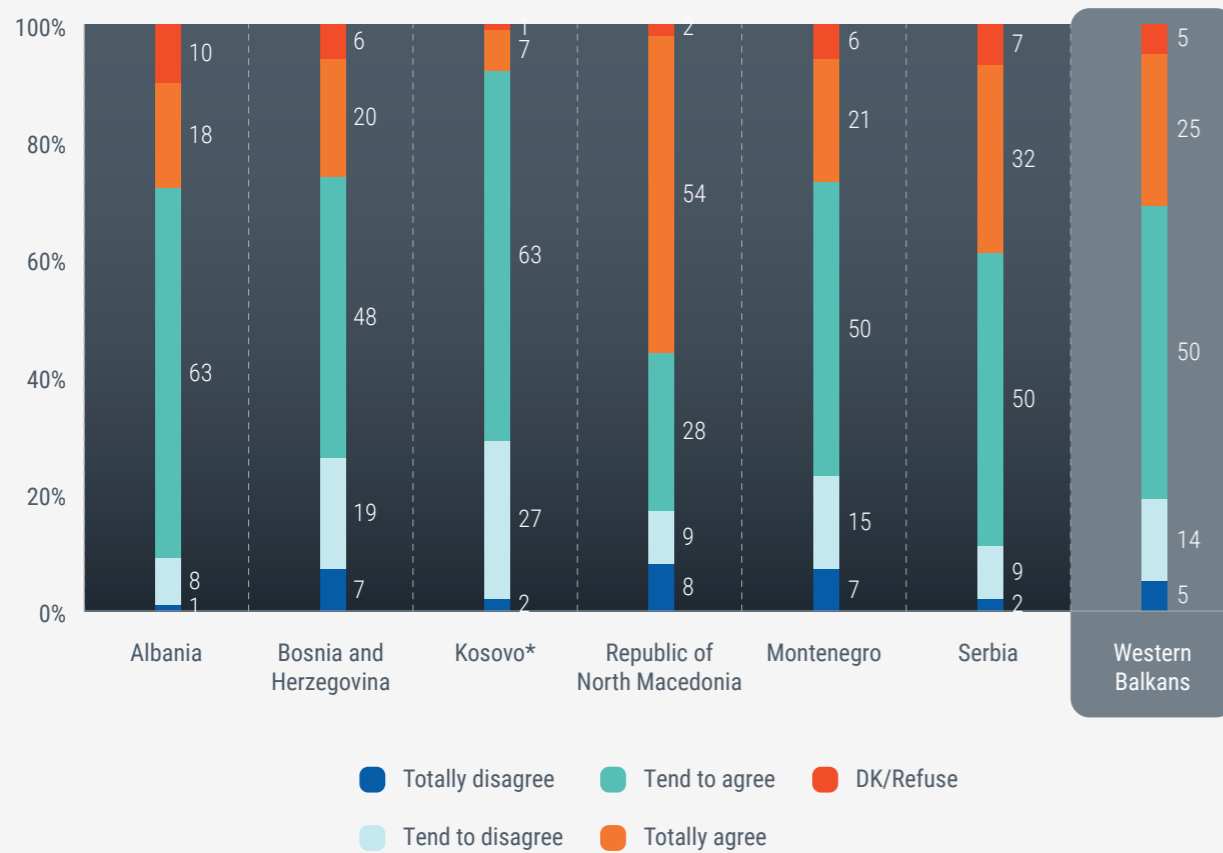
## F. HYBRID THREATS AND DISINFORMATION AS NEW SECURITY CHALLENGE

Hybrid threats attract the attention and understanding of the WB6 public with regard to their negative role as a potentially destabilising factor for the political, economic, and security situation. That disinformation is a new way of warfare waged by state and non-state actors against their economy is considered by the vast majority of respondents across the region,

as many as 76% of them, while only one-fifth (19%) do not perceive disinformation in that regard. Roughly four of five respondents in Serbia (82%), North Macedonia (81%), and Albania (80%) perceive disinformation as a new way of warfare against their economy. At the same time, Kosovo\* has the highest proportion of respondents who disagree with that sentiment (29%). Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (26%) and Montenegro (22%) have a similar perception. Across the age groups, negative impact of disinformation is considered more seriously by older people compared to younger respondents, aged 18-34. As the age of the respondents increases, the perception that disinformation is a form of hybrid warfare also increases.

**Figure 47: To what extent do you agree or disagree that disinformation is a new way of warfare that state and non-state actors wage against your economy?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

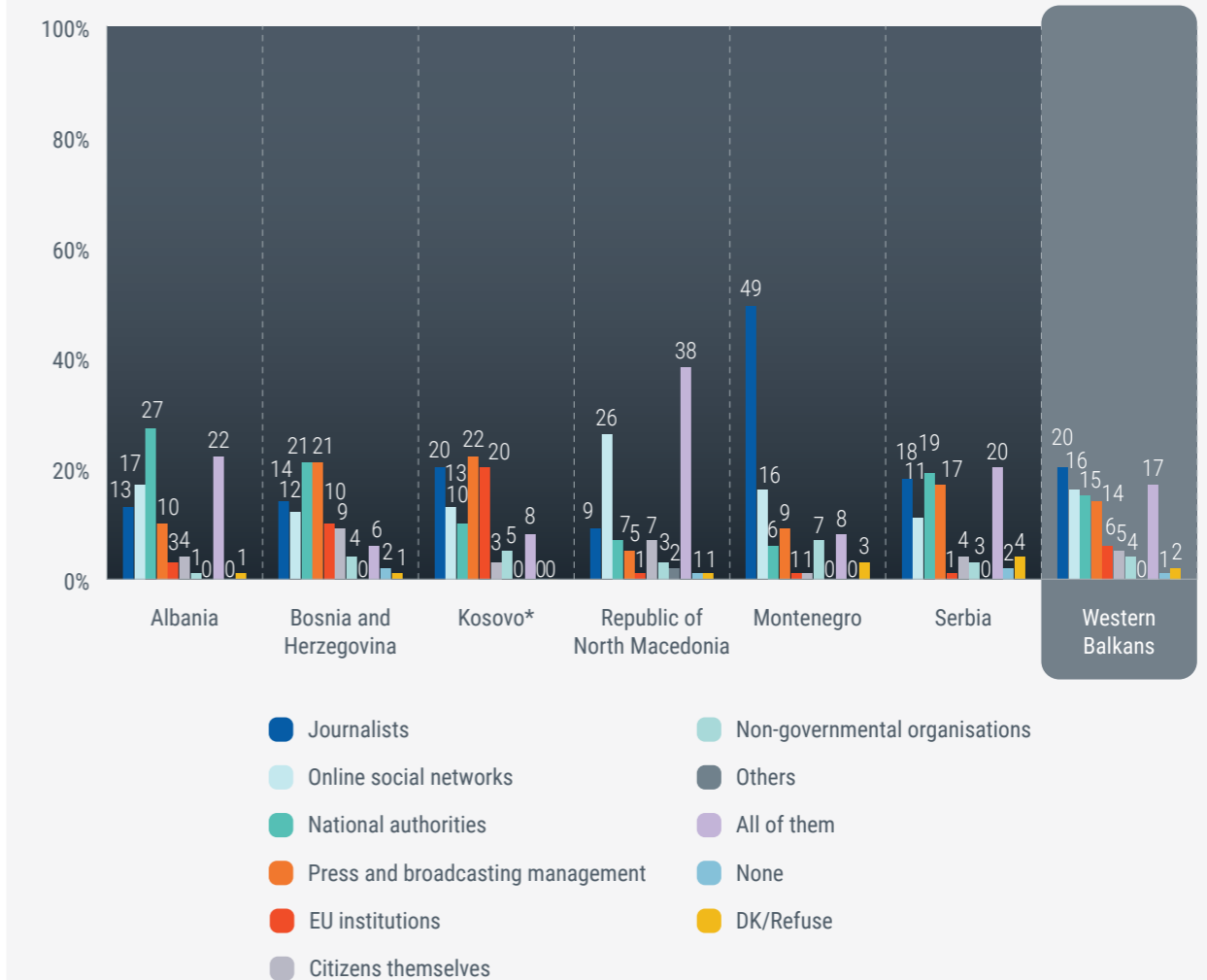


Every fifth respondent in the Western Balkans region considers journalists as the key actors who should act to stop the spread of fake news. 17% of all respondents indicated that the whole of society should work simultaneously to suppress the fake news phenomenon. It is interesting that, at economy level, almost every second Montenegrin (49%) considers journalists the first choice to combat fake news, while in North Macedonia, journalists are perceived as the first choice by only 9% of respondents. Macedonians, however, believe

that a more comprehensive approach is the best solution, with 38% choosing all institutions and media actors as their first choice in tackling disinformation. Every fifth citizen of Kosovo\* (20%) believes that foreign assistance, namely by EU institutions, is crucial for resolving the spread of fake news, while their counterparts from Montenegro (1%), North Macedonia (1%), Serbia (1%) and Albania (3%) do not consider at all that EU institutions should have a more significant role on this issue.

**Figure 48: News or information that misrepresent reality or that are even false are called "fake news". Which 3 (three) of the following institutions and media actors should act to stop the spread of "fake news"? – FIRST choice**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

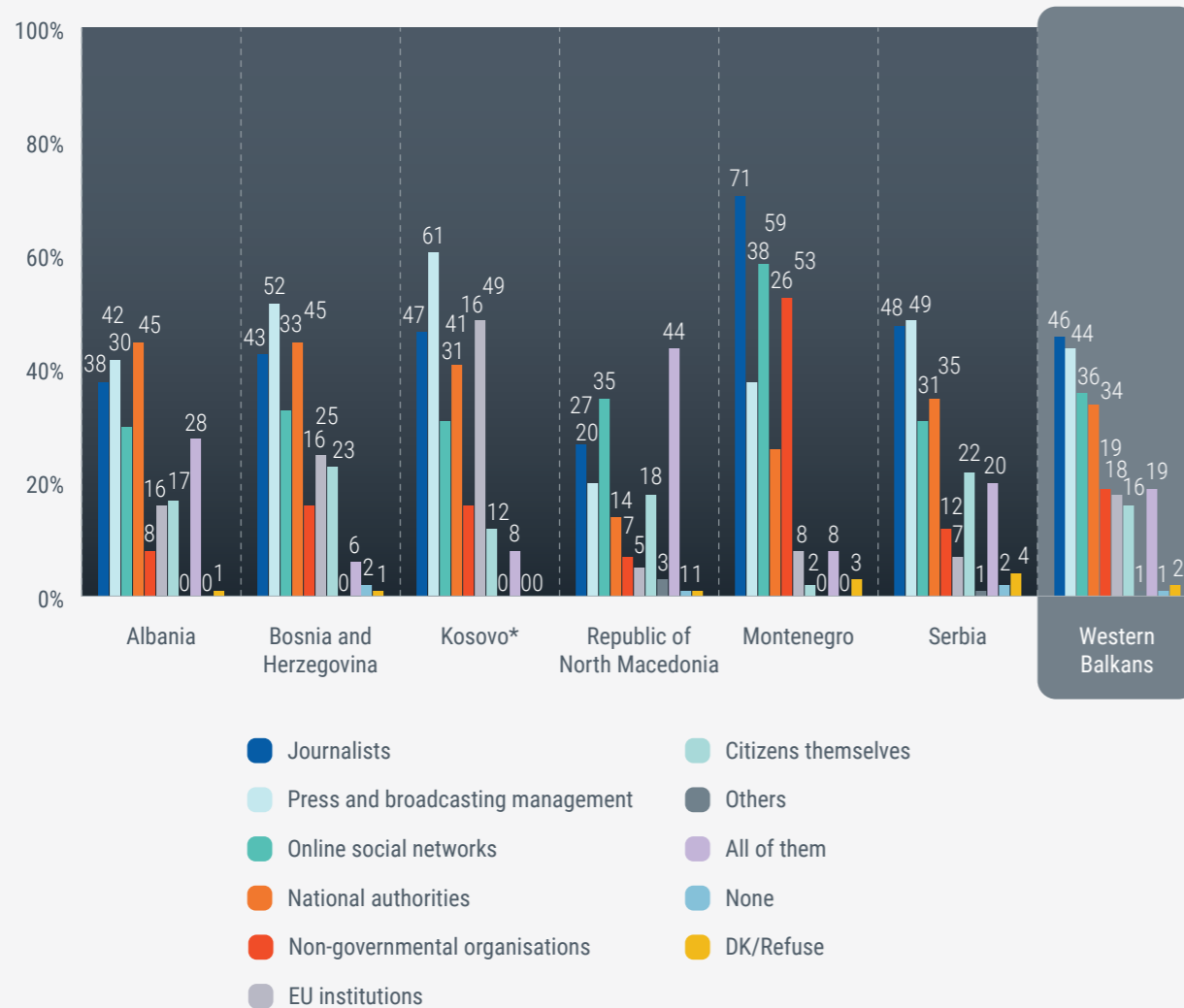


At the regional level, in addition to journalists (46%), the actors considered to have a role and obligation in halting the spread of fake news are: Press and Broadcasting Management - 44%; Online Social Networks - 36%, and National Authorities - 34%.



**Figure 49: News or information that misrepresent reality or that are even false are called "fake news". Which 3 (three) of the following institutions and media actors should act to stop the spread of "fake news"? – ALL choices**

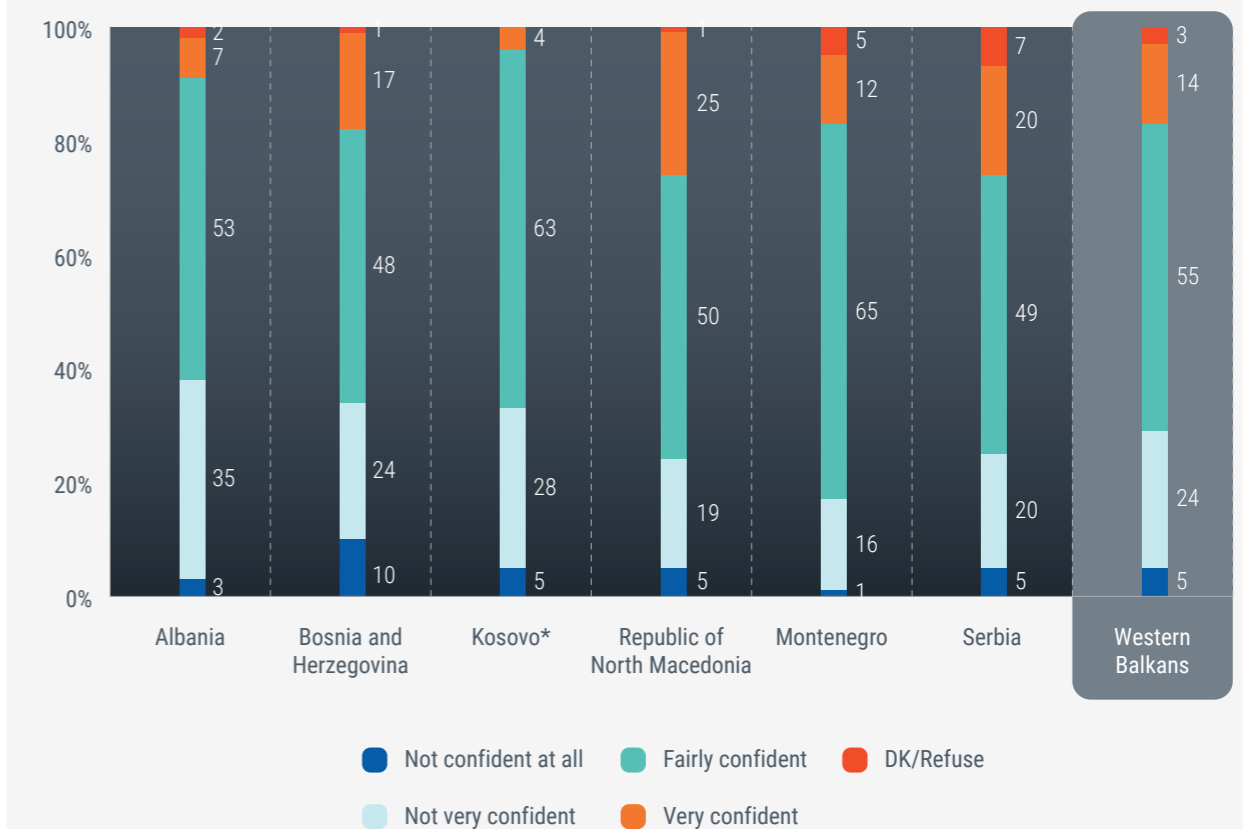
(All respondents, N=6046, multiple answer, share of total, %)



Encouragingly high number of respondents, nearly two-thirds (69%) at the regional level, reported they are confident that they are able to identify news that misrepresents reality. Montenegro (78%) and North Macedonia (75%) report the highest level of respondents' confidence and ability to identify news that misrepresents reality, while Albania (38%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (34%) are home to the highest number of respondents without the self-confidence to identify such stories. Men (72%) appear to be more confident in

recognising "fake news" compared to 66% of women's responses. The lack of formal or inadequate education have been shown to be a barrier to recognising fake news, meaning that people with a lower level of education are more susceptible and vulnerable to this phenomenon. Respondents with a university degree (79%) or a master's / doctoral degree showed higher self-confidence (85%) in identifying news that misrepresent reality, while people with primary education or without education felt that their self-confidence was below average (46%).

**Figure 50: How self-confident do you feel to identify news that misrepresents reality?**  
 (All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

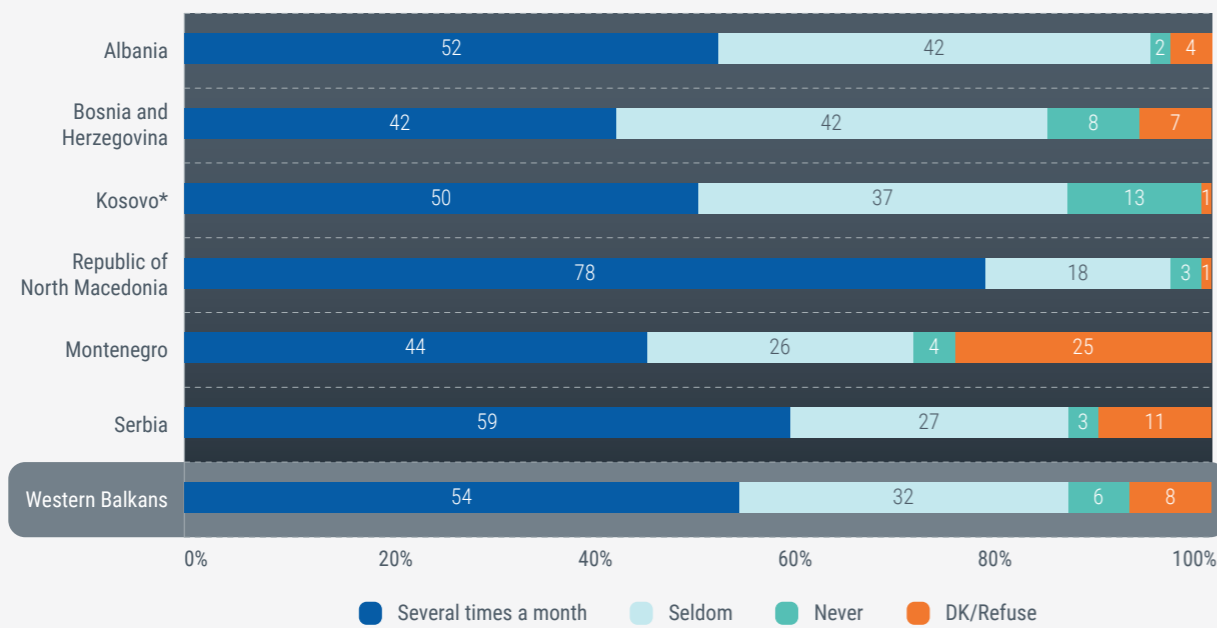


Every second resident of the region (54%) comes across news or information which misrepresents reality or is false several times a month, while 32% of respondents rarely notice it. Younger people, aged 18-24, and people without a college degree, are less likely to notice information that misrepresent reality,

compared to older respondents. Looking at the six economies individually, North Macedonia is home to the highest proportion of respondents (78%) who notice false news several times during the month. Kosovo\*, at the other end of the scale, has the most respondents who have never noticed such information or news (13%).

**Figure 51: How often do you come across news or information that you believe misrepresents reality or is even false?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, share of total, %)

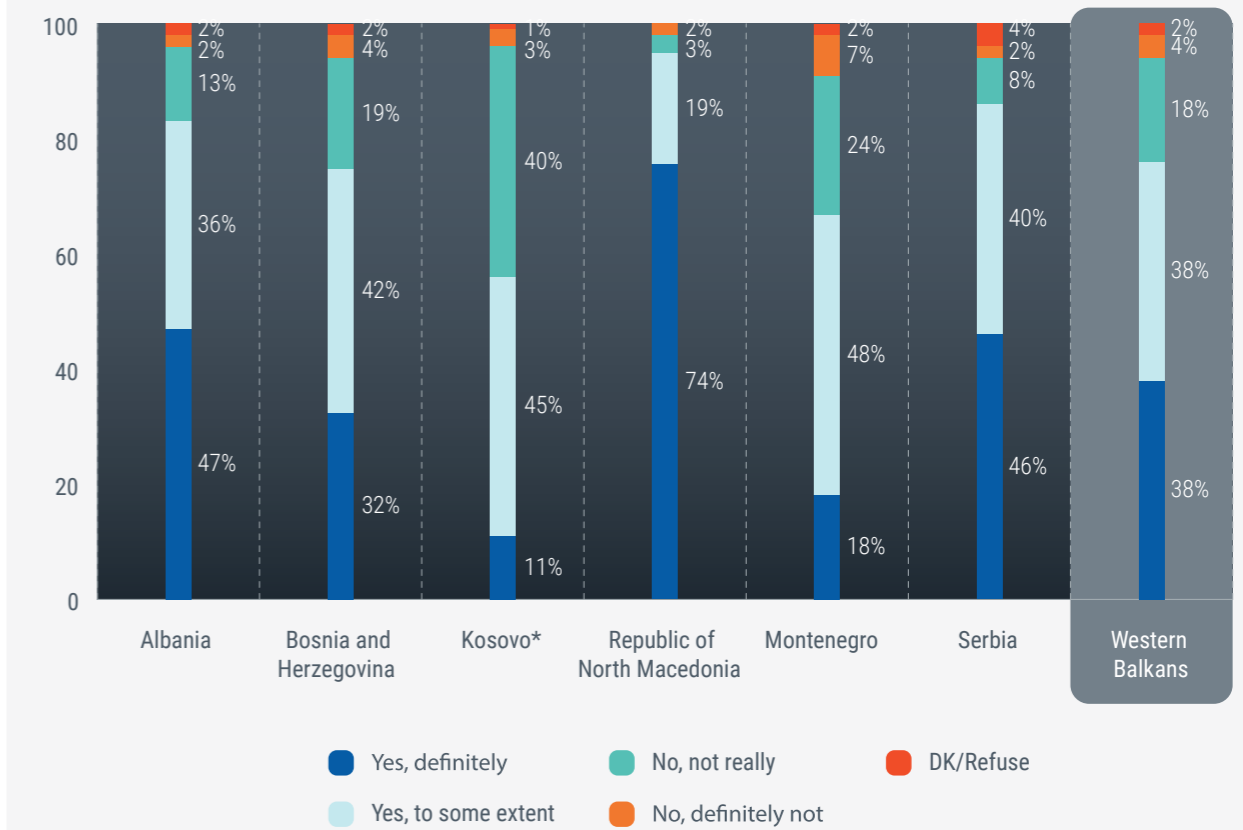


Some four-fifths (76%) of all surveyed respondents think that the existence of fake news or misinformation presents a problem in their economy, while one-fifth do not think so. Viewed by individual economy, almost all Macedonian respondents (94%) perceive fake news or misinformation as a possible

problem to their economy. They are followed by respondents from Serbia (86%), Albania (83%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (74%), and Montenegro (67%). Kosovo\* stands out in the opposite direction, as 43% of respondents do not consider misinformation and fake news to be a problem.

**Figure 52: In your opinion, is the existence of fake news or misinformation a problem in your economy?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

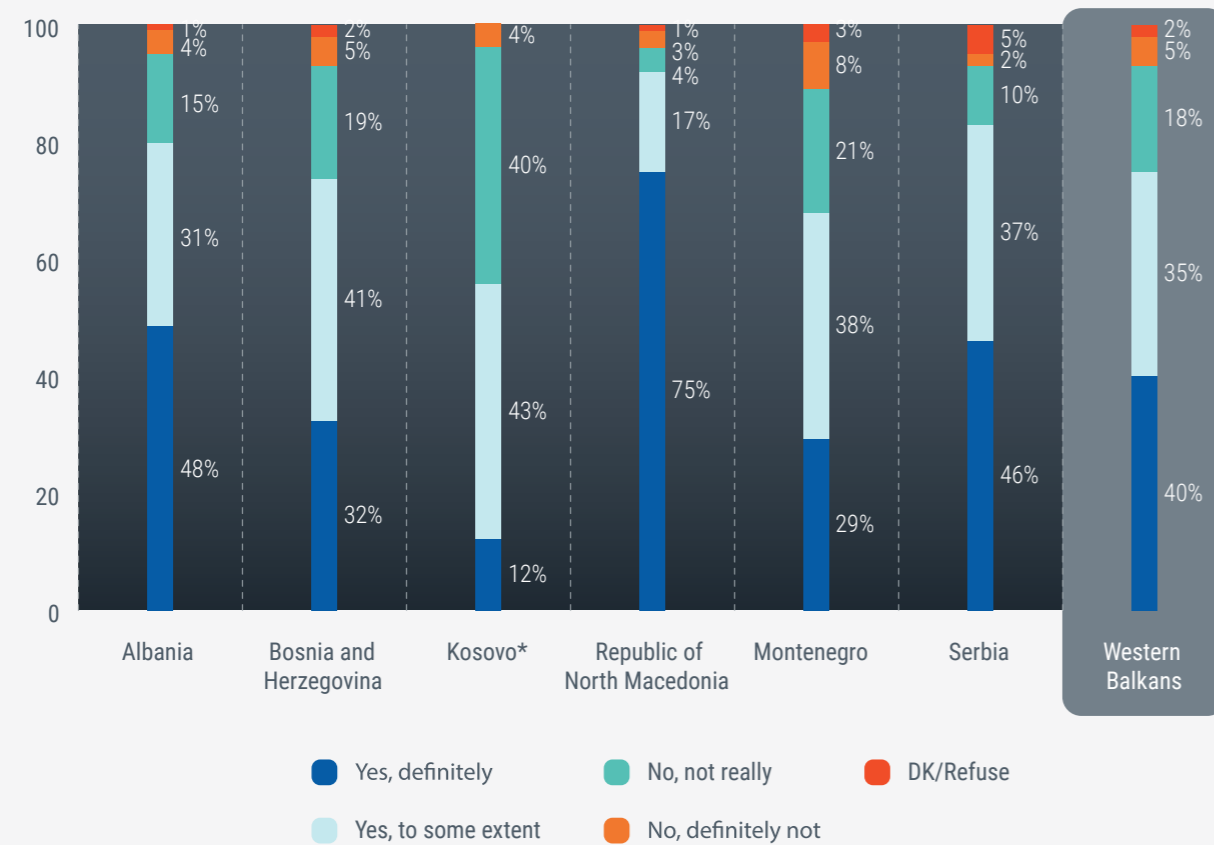


These answers correspond and are almost identical, both on regional and individual level, to the next question of whether the "existence

of fake news and the fake narrative is a problem for democracy in general". Most respondents – 75% - from WB region consider it a problem.

**Figure 53: In your opinion, is the existence of fake news, fake narrative a problem for democracy in general?**

(All respondents, N=6046, single answer, scale from 1 to 4, share of total, %)

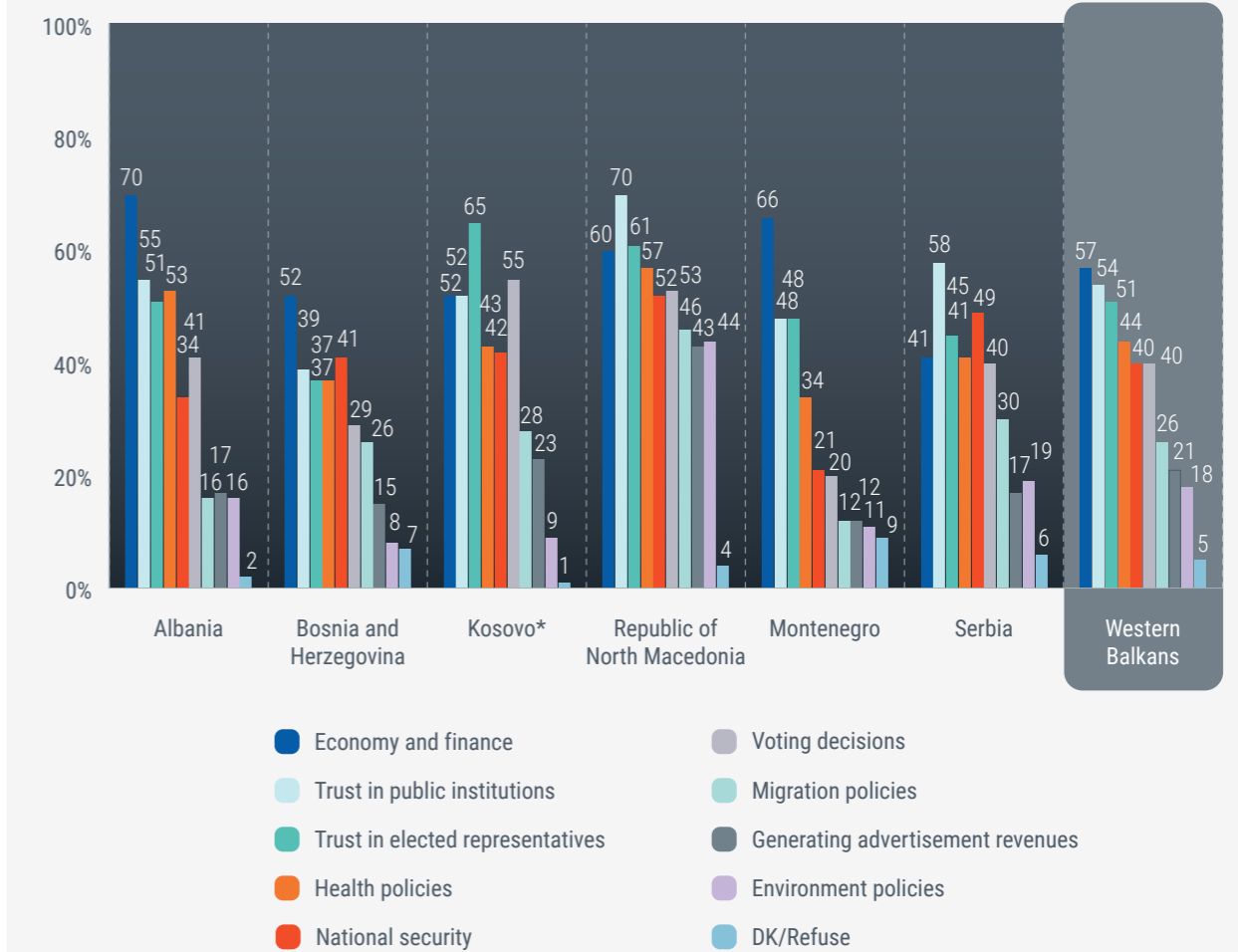


Results for the entire region show us that three areas of public life are considered to be threatened by intentional disinformation: economy and finance (57%); trust in public institutions (54%); trust in elected representatives (51%). In fourth and fifth place are health policies (44%) and national security (40%). Albanian respondents are in the region most concerned (70%) with the disruption disinformation can cause to the economy and finance sector. Similar attitudes prevail in Montenegro (66%), but in

Serbia, only 44% of respondents believe that disinformation can harm the financial sector. North Macedonia records a remarkable hike in the number of respondents anxious over the impact of disinformation on the trust in public institutions (70%). North Macedonia moreover leads the region with the number of respondents aware that disinformation can cause harm to environmental policies (43%), while this perception is lowest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (8%).

**Figure 54: In which of the following areas of public life in your economy can intentional disinformation cause harm?**

(All respondents, N=6046, multiple answer, share of total, %)



## CONCLUSIONS

Although the general impression from the survey is positive, the analysis of the data collected showcase that the opinion of the citizens of the Western Balkans leans in favour of undertaking actions that would improve the security situation in their economies and at the regional level. They expect law enforcement institutions to act accountably and proactively, and to have sufficient capacities to do so. There is a noted sense of dissatisfaction with the work of the justice and home affairs apparatus, both domestically and regionally, which consequently may lead towards a widening mistrust gap.



In general the WB is considered a safe place to live in. However, the results show that there are several key problems facing the WB6 region, such as the economic crises, poverty, social exclusion, crime in general, organised crime, drugs trafficking, violence, vandalism, pandemic and natural and man-made disasters, climate change and pollution. This is a complex nexus of challenges that requires a holistic policy approach. Respondents clearly expect EU-modelled domestic reforms, a more visible EU path and more inclusive regional cooperation, and consider these as important steps to be taken along the way. This also showcases the extent to which people seem to understand security prospect as intrinsically linked part of the entire socio-economic challenge.



Furthermore, citizens of the Western Balkans believe that additional actions are needed in order to effectively fight terrorism and violent extremism, deal with migrant crisis, combat organised crime, act for improved

cybersecurity and address the issues related to financial crime. It seems that respondents have a good understanding of the growing challenge of virtual extremism and terrorism that has detrimental potential and may consequently lead to physical destruction. Therefore, there is a quite clear message for domestic and regional stakeholders that they should continue fighting terrorism, violent extremism and organised crime in as sophisticated manner as the illegal activities evolve and adapt to new realities. It should not be left unnoticed that in some economies people are growingly resistant to the prospect of accepting the return of families of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, which pinpoints necessity for more grass-root work and whole-of-society approach in confronting such phenomena.



Gun ownership does not appear to be an attractive option for Western Balkans citizens. For almost half of respondents, illegal use of firearms in their neighbourhoods is a cause for concern. What is most worrying is the gender dimension in this area, which is much more accentuated than in other questions pertaining to various security threats. Women are more likely to fear a gun in their household; and they are less likely to consider owning a firearm. This discrepancy suggests that one segment of the population feels more under threat by firearms than their male counterparts. In devising policies to control gun ownership and combat illicit possession, the awareness of this gender dimension should therefore be highly present. Given that illicit possession is often linked to illegal trafficking, cooperation across boundaries in this field is indispensable.

Further work is also expected in dealing with migration crisis, with most of the citizens believing that migrants entering the respondents' respective economies increase the security risks. Perception of illegal migrants as a direct security threat, in some economies prevalently so, sends a resolute message for more institutional resilience and work which will deter citizens from "taking security in their own hands". This is very important in order to avoid dangerous societal and even political rifts in some of the economies.



Natural disasters present a serious threat for the citizens, therefore targeted actions developed within the framework of regional cooperation and joint preparedness for natural disasters are expected in this area as well. Recent earthquakes, floods and even health emergencies such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, albeit not a natural disaster per se, have contributed to a common narrative, visible in this survey, that these challenges cannot be dealt with at the local level, within the territories of each individual economy. On the contrary, citizens are highly aware of detrimental economic potential which natural and man-made disaster might have, and recognise regional approach and solidarity as a key tool in forming an adequate response. The high level of readiness among region's citizens to consider joining community-based voluntary initiatives so as to increase disaster preparedness is also an indication of the citizens' awareness of the need to increase knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management.



Proliferation of disinformation is widely perceived as a new way of warfare that state and non-state actors wage against the economies. This is true especially for youth, who seem to be the category with least knowledge on the negative impact of disinformation and its potential to alter the information landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally

highlighted this phenomenon and exposed systemic loopholes in the regulation of the sphere of social media. Actions devised in a comprehensive and sophisticated manner, which do not trade freedom of speech for security from malignant influence of 'virtual' enemies, come to the forefront of future initiatives in this area. However, a good indication of positive use of pre-emptive ways of mitigating the problems of disinformation in WB is revealed from the fact that a high percentage of respondents feel capable of identifying news that misrepresents reality.



Finally, with all of the above elaborated, it can be concluded that Western Balkans citizens remain highly alert to security threats and that targeted actions on national and regional level are needed in all aspects of security sphere. This survey also highlights the importance of greater public education on the pressing security threats in the Western Balkans, their consequences, and how their impact can be avoided or mitigated. In addition to this, joint regional actions can be considered as an added-value element in achieving better security situation in the region, while regional mechanisms established to deal with different security threats are considered effective, and warmly welcomed by the citizens. These findings also support the rationale behind IISG and RCC focus of tackling security threats in a coordinated regional manner.



# METHODOLOGY

Methodology used for Public Opinion Survey is quantitative research and data collection method CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing). The surveys were conducted via phone household interviews carried out by trained interviewers from Indago in the period 28 January – 19 February 2021 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia.

As part of project set-up phase, some preparations and adjustments were undertaken as necessary for the successful implementation of the survey:

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The initial draft questionnaire was provided by RCC/IISG, while the final design was prepared by Indago. The questionnaire of 47 questions in total with additional demographic questions was originally written in English and subsequently translated into related local languages by Indago. Since the CATI methodology was used in the research, all questionnaires were converted/programmed to a digital form to include all the scripting and the interviewers' instructions.

## INTERVIEWERS

The surveys were conducted by experienced interviewers in all economies. All interviewers were given detailed instructions containing general description of the project objective and the method of selecting the respondents, and the questionnaire. In addition, project coordinators reviewed the programmed questionnaires jointly with the interviewers and emphasised all important elements (especially the need to read individual answers where one or more answers were possible, etc.).

## SAMPLE

Public Opinion Survey was conducted among minimum N=1000 respondents in each economy, aged 18+ with the total sample size in six (6) economies N=6046 respondents for the entire Western Balkans region.

The target respondents were persons:

- aged 18 or older who reside in private households,
- whose usual place of residence is in the territory of the economies included in the survey,
- who speak the national language(s) well enough to respond to the questionnaire.

Table 1: Sample structure by region

Economy	Region	%
Albania	Berat	5.3%
	Dibër	4.5%
	Durrës	9.3%
	Elbasan	10.4%
	Fier	11.2%
	Gjirokastrë	2.8%
	Korçë	8.2%
	Kukës	2.7%
	Lezhë	4.6%
	Shkodër	7.5%
	Tiranë	27.1%
	Vlorë	6.5%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Federacija BiH	62.1%
	Republika Srpska	35.5%
	Brčko Distrikt	2.4%
Kosovo*	Ferizaj	10.5%
	Gjilan	10.6%
	Peja	10.1%
	Mitrovica	11.2%
	Prizren	18.7%
	Gjakovë	11.4%
	Prishtinë	27.6%
Republic of North Macedonia	Vardar	7.9%
	East	9.3%
	Southwest	10.5%
	Southeast	8.6%
	Pealgonia	12.4%
	Polog	13.9%
	Northeast	8.4%
Skopje	29.0%	
Montenegro	North	28.3%
	Centre	47.2%
	South	24.5%
Serbia	Belgrade	23.2%
	Southern and Eastern Serbia	21.8%
	Central and Western Serbia	28.1%
	Vojvodina	26.8%

Figure 55: Sample structure by gender<sup>6</sup>

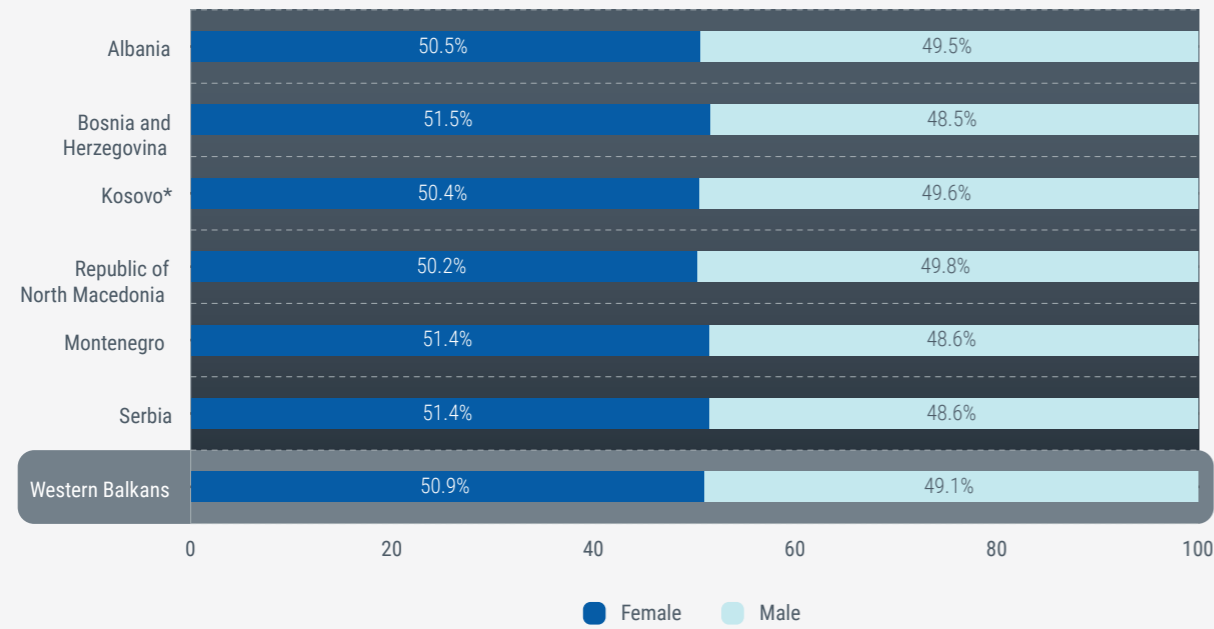


Figure 57: Sample structure by education<sup>8</sup>

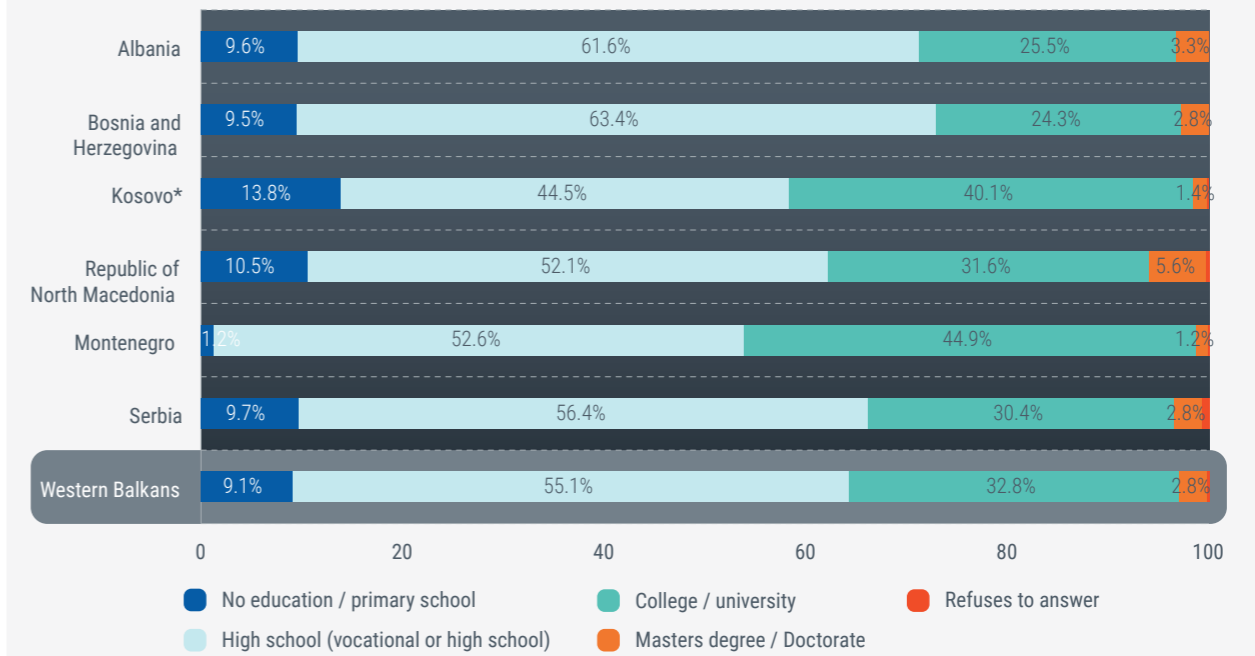


Figure 56: Sample structure by age<sup>7</sup>

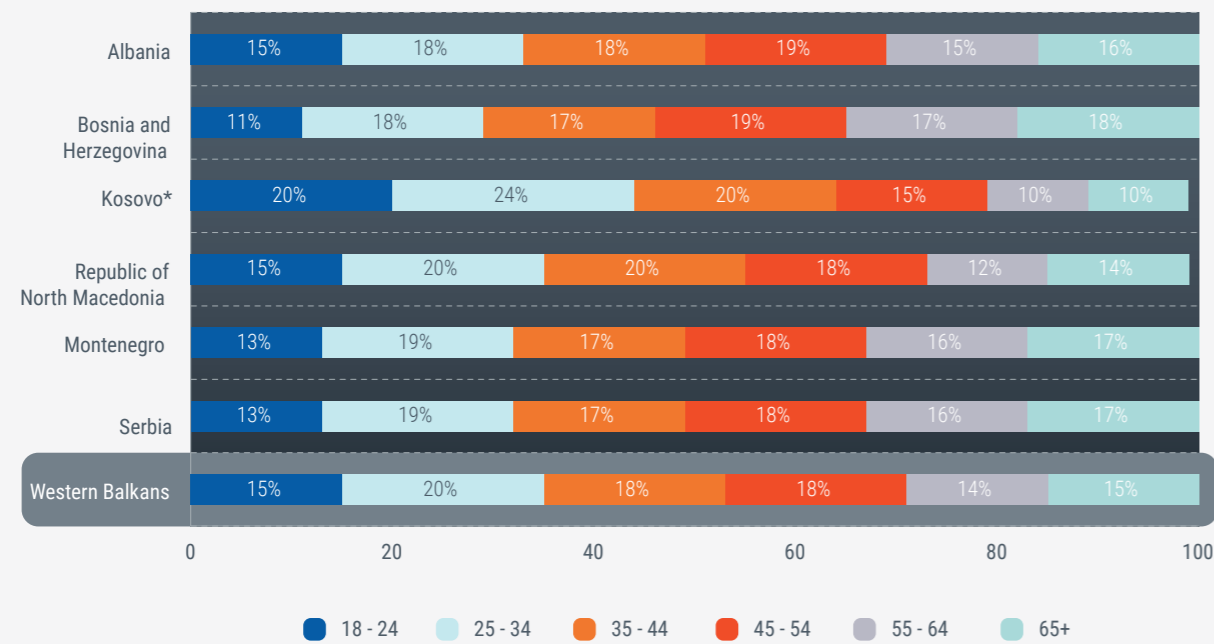
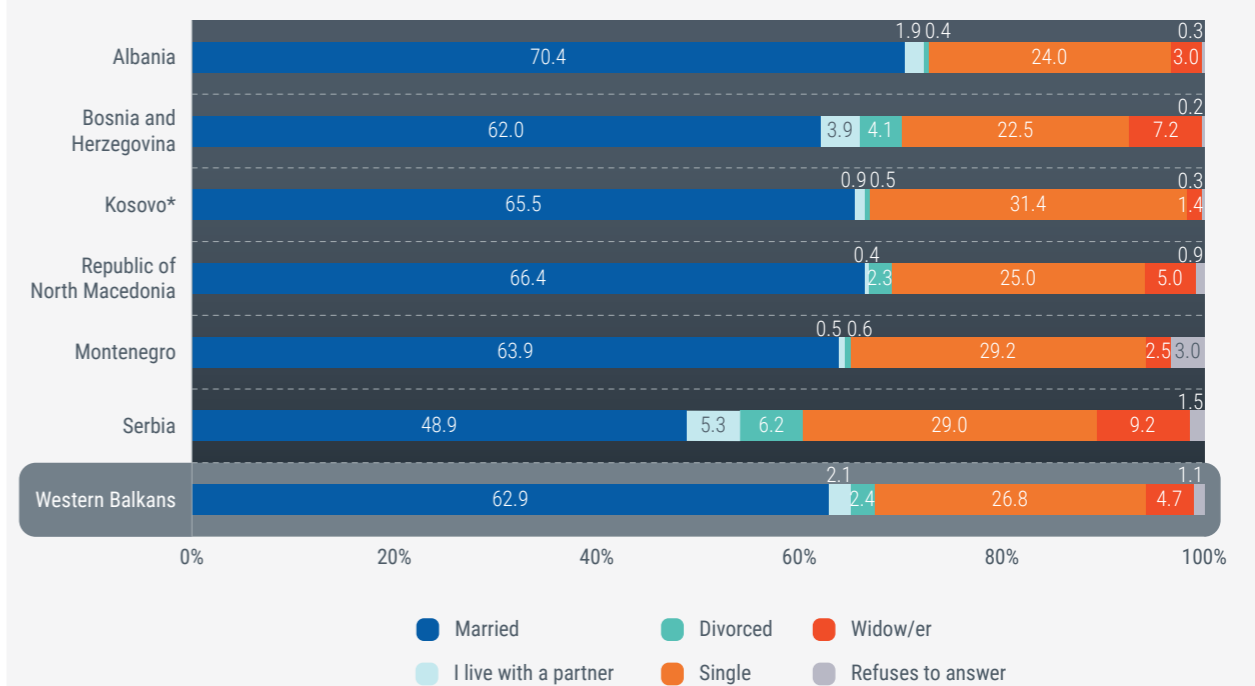


Figure 58: Sample structure by marital status<sup>9</sup>



6 The figures might not add to 100% due to rounding.

7 The figures might not add to 100% due to rounding.

8 The figures might not add to 100% due to rounding.

9 The figures might not add to 100% due to rounding.



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