



*Issue No. 9*

# **WEAPON SEIZURES**

## **in South East Europe in 2021**



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## ABOUT IN FOCUS - ARMED VIOLENCE MONITOR

*In Focus - Armed Violence Monitors* provide information on the specific types of firearm incidents and the related topics to illustrate the magnitude of firearms' adverse impact on civilians.

This issue focuses on **weapons seizures** in South East Europe (SEE) from **1 January to 31 December 2021**, including a comparative overview to 2020. Throughout the years, weapon seizures continue to be the most frequently reported type of incident, showing a proactive law enforcement response to combating the use, proliferation and trafficking of firearms, ammunition and explosives (FAE). In this report, weapons seizures refer to all cases in which law enforcement agencies took hold of FAE for numerous reasons, including illegal possession, lack of proof of ownership, voluntary surrender, or as crime scene evidence.

### METHODOLOGY

The information provided in this report is gathered from the [Armed Violence Monitoring Platform \(AVMP\)](#), which captures data on firearm-related incidents happening in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Kosovo\* and the Republic of Moldova.

The data is gathered daily from the relevant authorities' official websites, as well as print and online media. Data for Kosovo is also gathered from the police daily incident reports. Quality assurance is conducted rigorously by SEESAC. The platform has seen significant improvements in recent years in terms of data collection and categorization.

The AVMP has been established by SEESAC and funded by the European Union within the framework of [EU Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2016/2356](#) and [EU Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2019/2111](#).

## HIGHLIGHTS

**1,536**

**cases of weapon seizures** were recorded on the AVMP in 2021, showing a 24% increase from 2020.

**512**

reported cases in which **handguns** were seized as a single type of weapon.

**1,595**

**perpetrators** were reported in connection to weapon seizures.

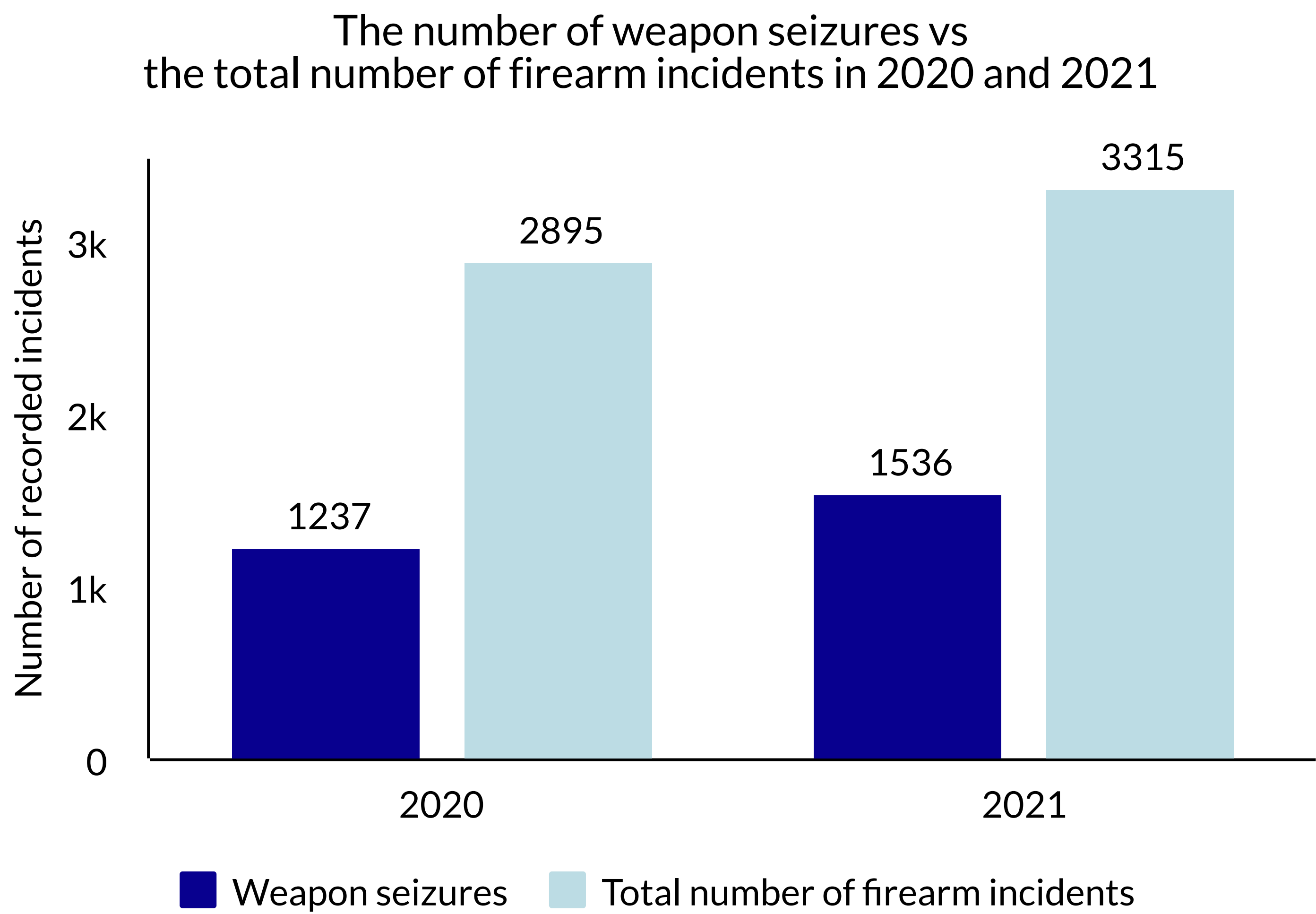
*\*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).*



# 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

In the AVMP, weapons seizures are recorded as a separate type of incident category that includes all cases in which a seizure was the main event. Weapon seizures arising from other types of firearm incidents are not included in this category. Thus, **a total of 770 weapon seizures** reported in connection to the criminal context, public disputes, domestic violence and other types of incidents are not covered in this report.

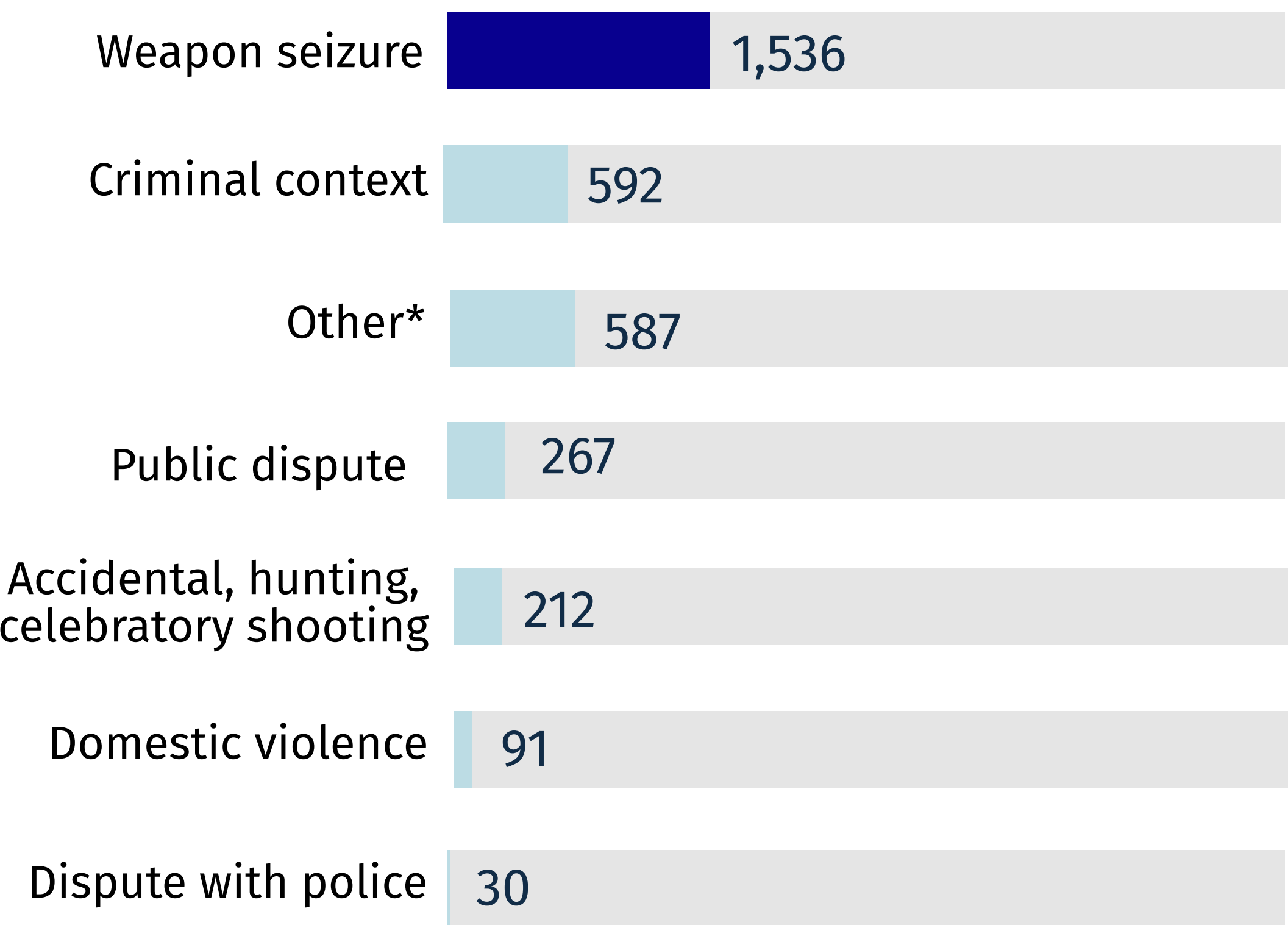
The year 2021 saw a 24% increase in the number of weapon seizures compared to 2020. This increase was reflected in the overall number of firearm incidents in the region, which rose by 14%. It needs to be emphasised that in both years, weapon seizures accounted for nearly half of all reported firearm incidents.



## 1.1. Weapon seizures vs other types of firearm incidents

Following the same trend from 2020, weapon seizures continued to be the most frequently reported type of incident in the region in 2021 **accounting for 46% of all firearm incidents**, while the incidents in the criminal context and incidents falling under the Other<sup>1</sup>category, ranking second and third respectively, made up 18% each.

Weapon seizures vs types of firearm incidents in 2021

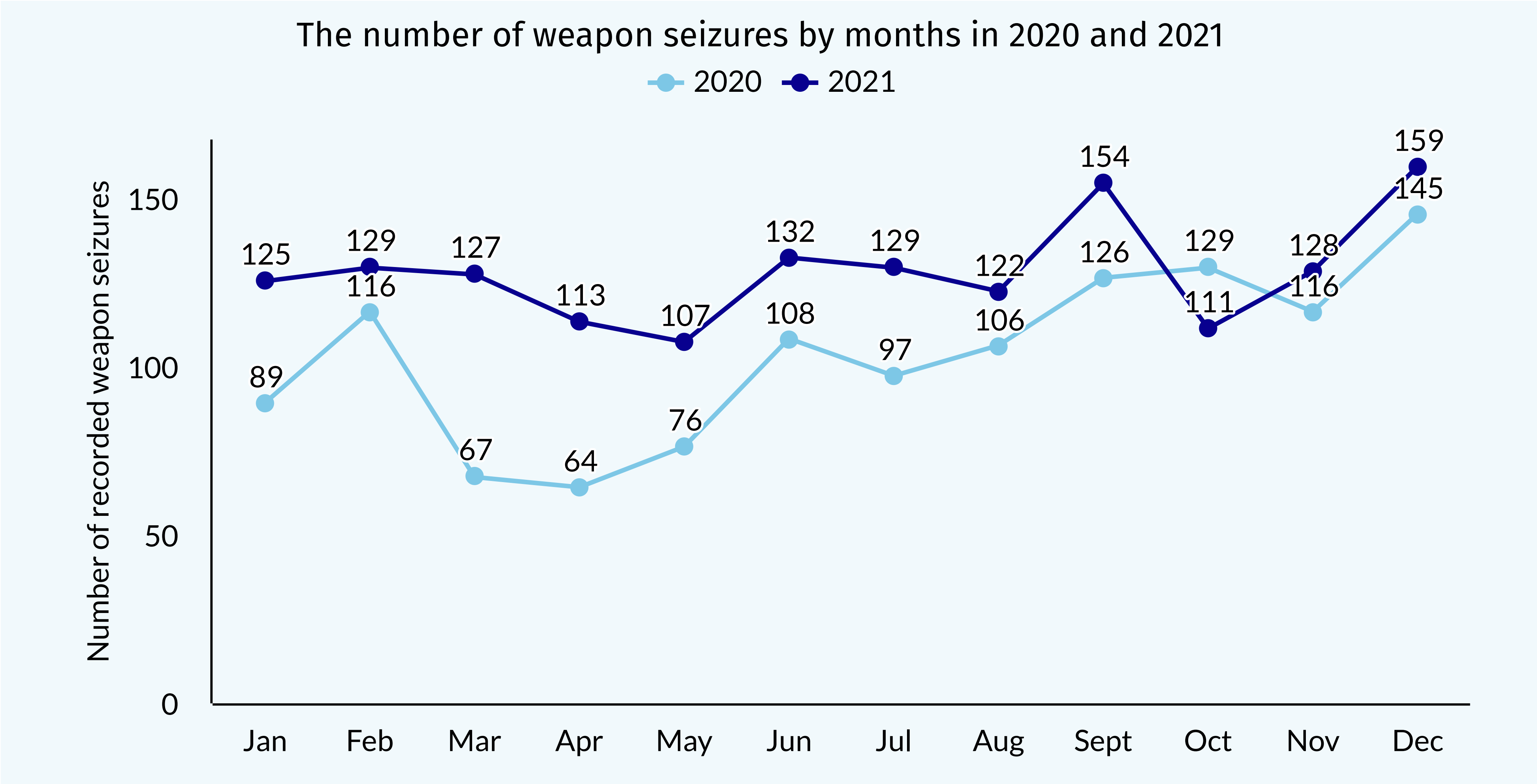


<sup>1</sup> Other as a separate category under the Types of Firearm incidents refers to suicides, shootings under undetermined circumstances, non-hunting related shooting of animals, undetermined explosions, weapons used for defence, and all other incidents that cannot be classified under any of the categories above.



### 1.2 Weapon seizures throughout 2021

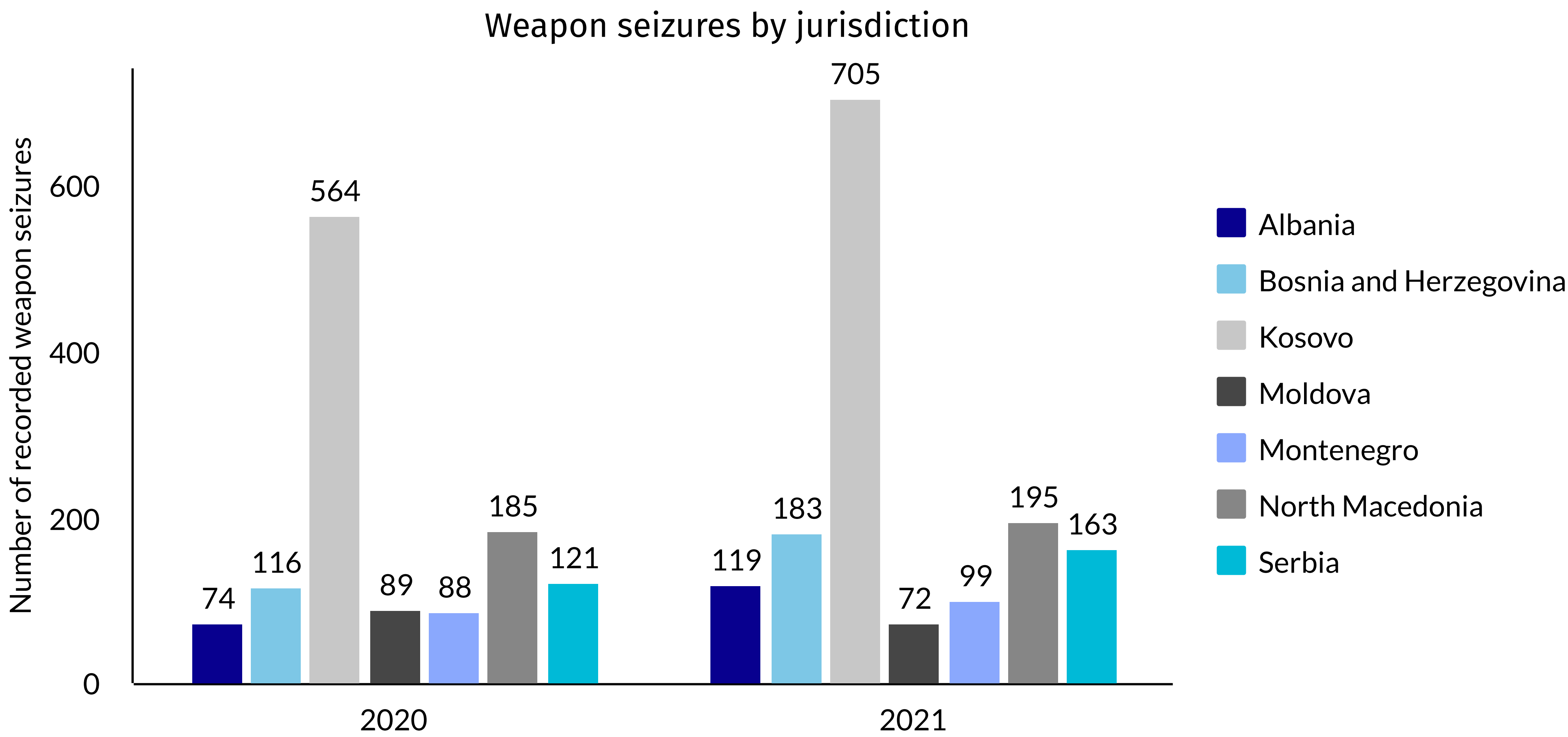
The number of weapons seizures averaged 128 cases per month in 2021. Overall, the trend remained relatively stable throughout the year with drops observed in May (107) and October (111), while September (154) and December (159), respectively, saw the highest number of weapon seizures.



### 1.3 Weapon seizures in jurisdictions

In comparison to 2020, all jurisdictions reported an increase in weapon seizures, with the exception of Moldova, where the number decreased. The notable increases were reported in Albania (60%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (57%), Serbia (34%) and Kosovo (25%).

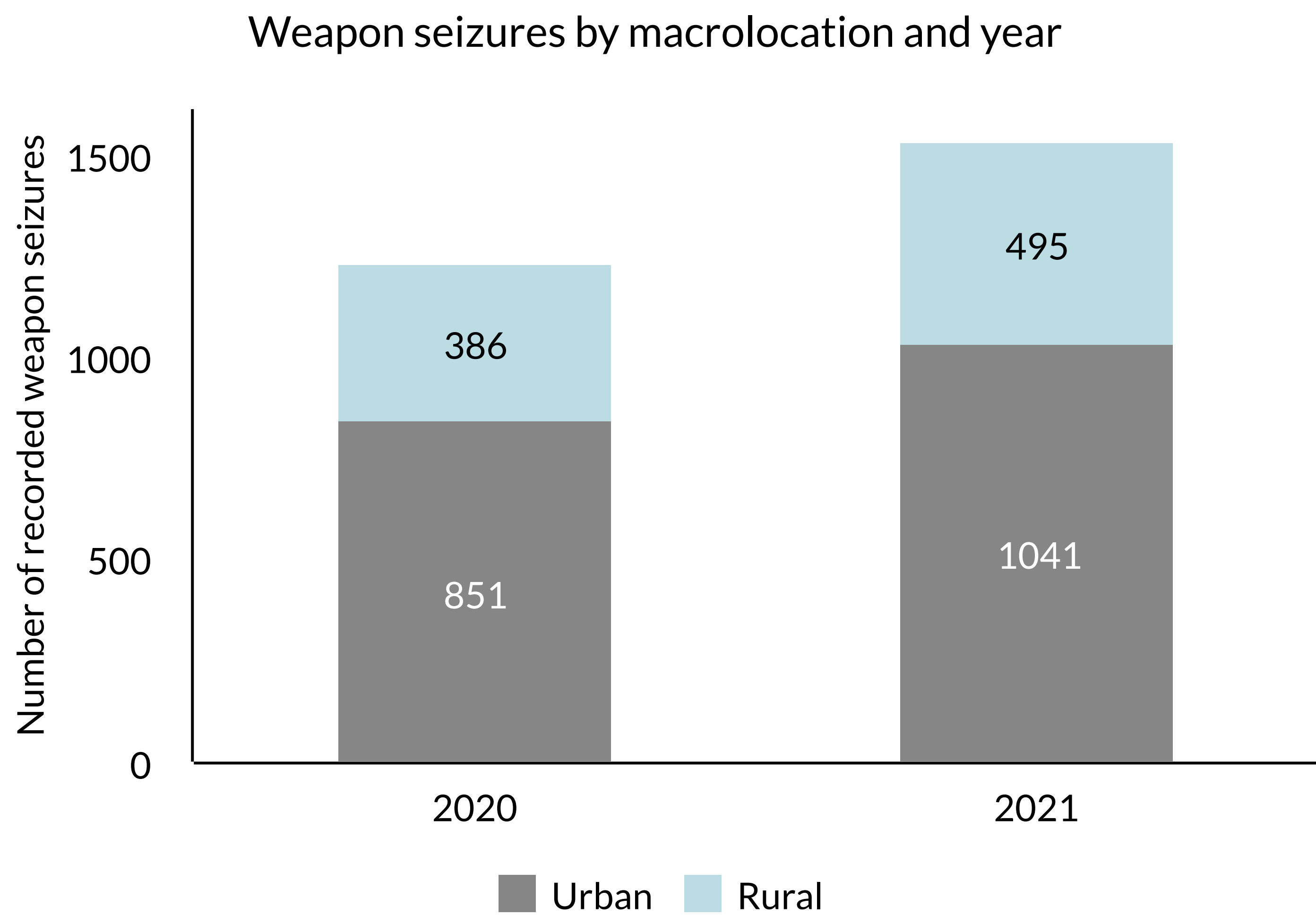
The highest number of cases was reported in Kosovo (705), which accounted for 46% of all reported seizures both in 2020 and 2021. North Macedonia (195), Bosnia and Herzegovina (183) and Serbia (163) followed.



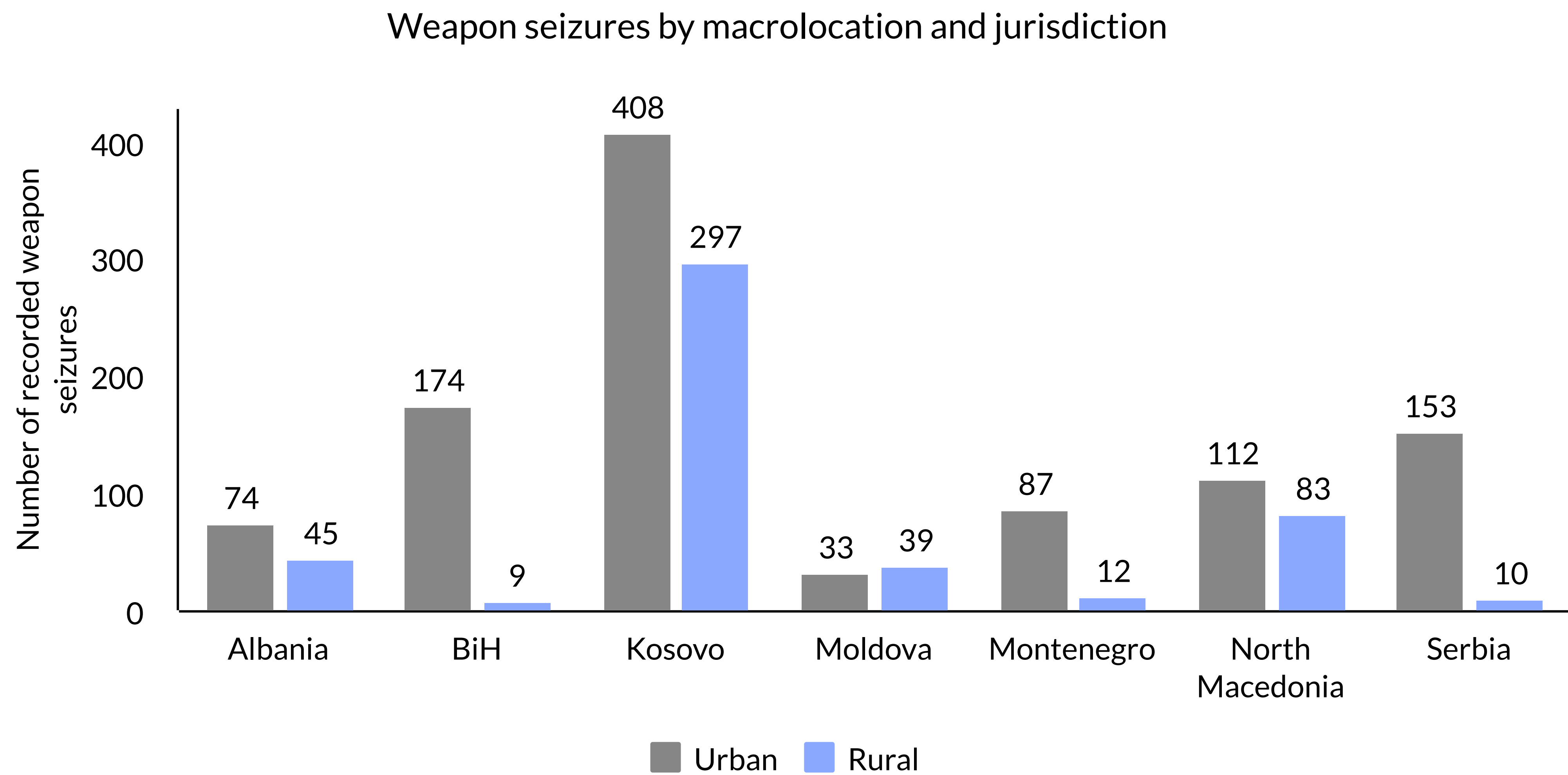


1.4 Macrolocation

The macrolocation statistics for both 2020 and 2021, show that weapon seizures occurring in urban areas were nearly twice as frequent as those occurring in rural areas.



In 2021, this trend was documented across the region, with the exception of Moldova, which reported a higher number of weapon seizures in the rural area. In Albania, Kosovo, Moldova, and North Macedonia, the disparity between weapon seizures in urban and rural was less pronounced than in other jurisdictions.



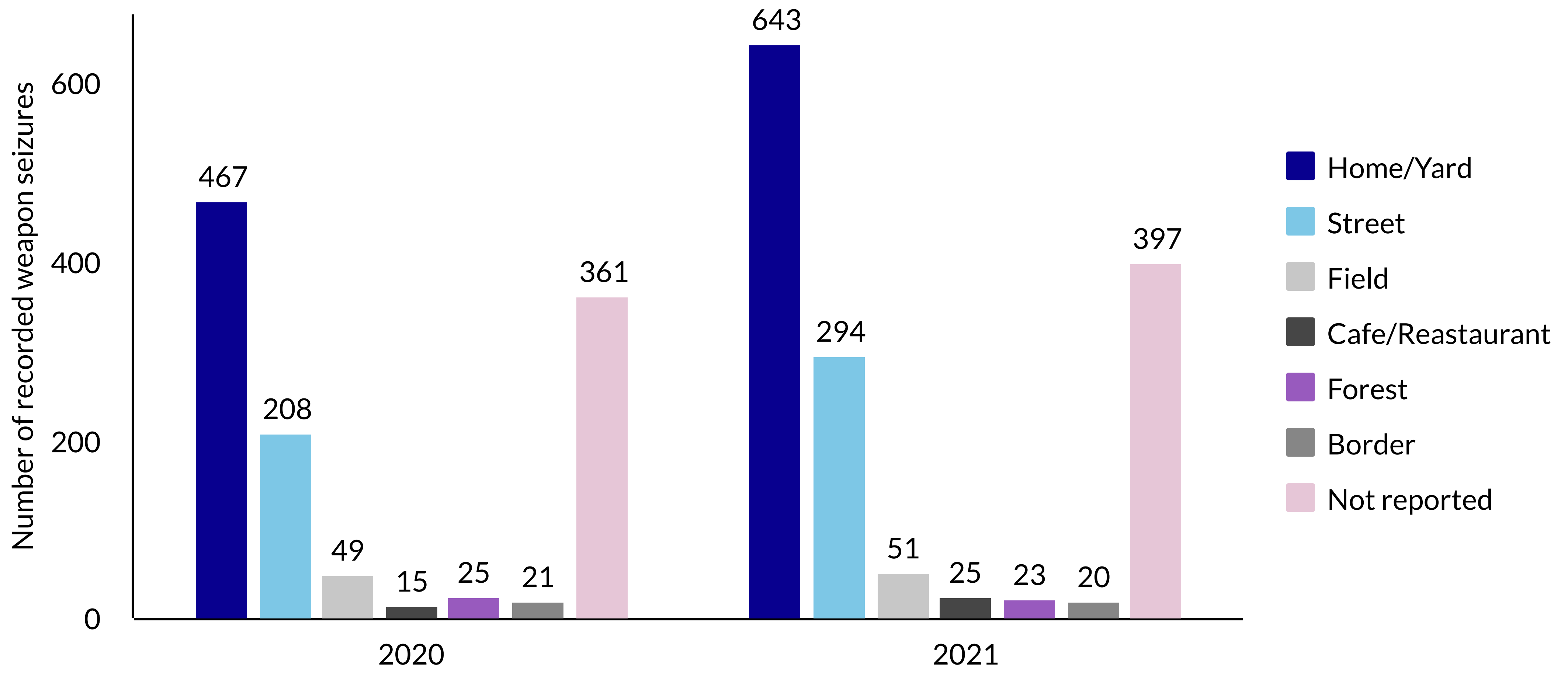


1.5 Microlocation


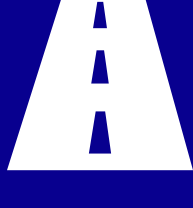
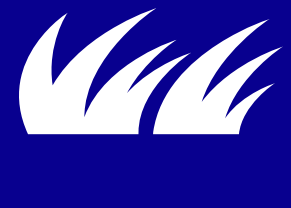


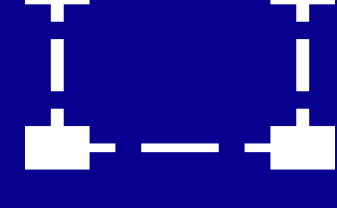
In 2021, the data on microlocation was reported for 1,139, i.e. 74% cases, whereas no such information was provided for 397 (26%) weapon seizures.

The majority of microlocation trends seen in 2020 persisted in 2021. Thus, most weapon seizures took place at homes/yards (643 or 56%), 294 (26%) in the street, while 51 (4%) took place in the fields. A total of 20 (2%) weapon seizure cases were reported at border areas, the same share as in 2020.

Six most reported microlocations by year



In 2021, in all jurisdictions, weapon seizures primarily occurred at homes, followed by streets. The shift in the trend was observed in Albania, where most weapon seizures in 2020 took place on the streets, while in 2021 they mainly occurred at homes. In Kosovo, weapon seizures taking place on the streets increased by nearly 70% from 2020. Weapon seizures reported in the forest and fields mostly involved the case of accidentally found explosives by citizens. Moldova (11) accounted for more than half of all weapon seizures recorded at the border (11).

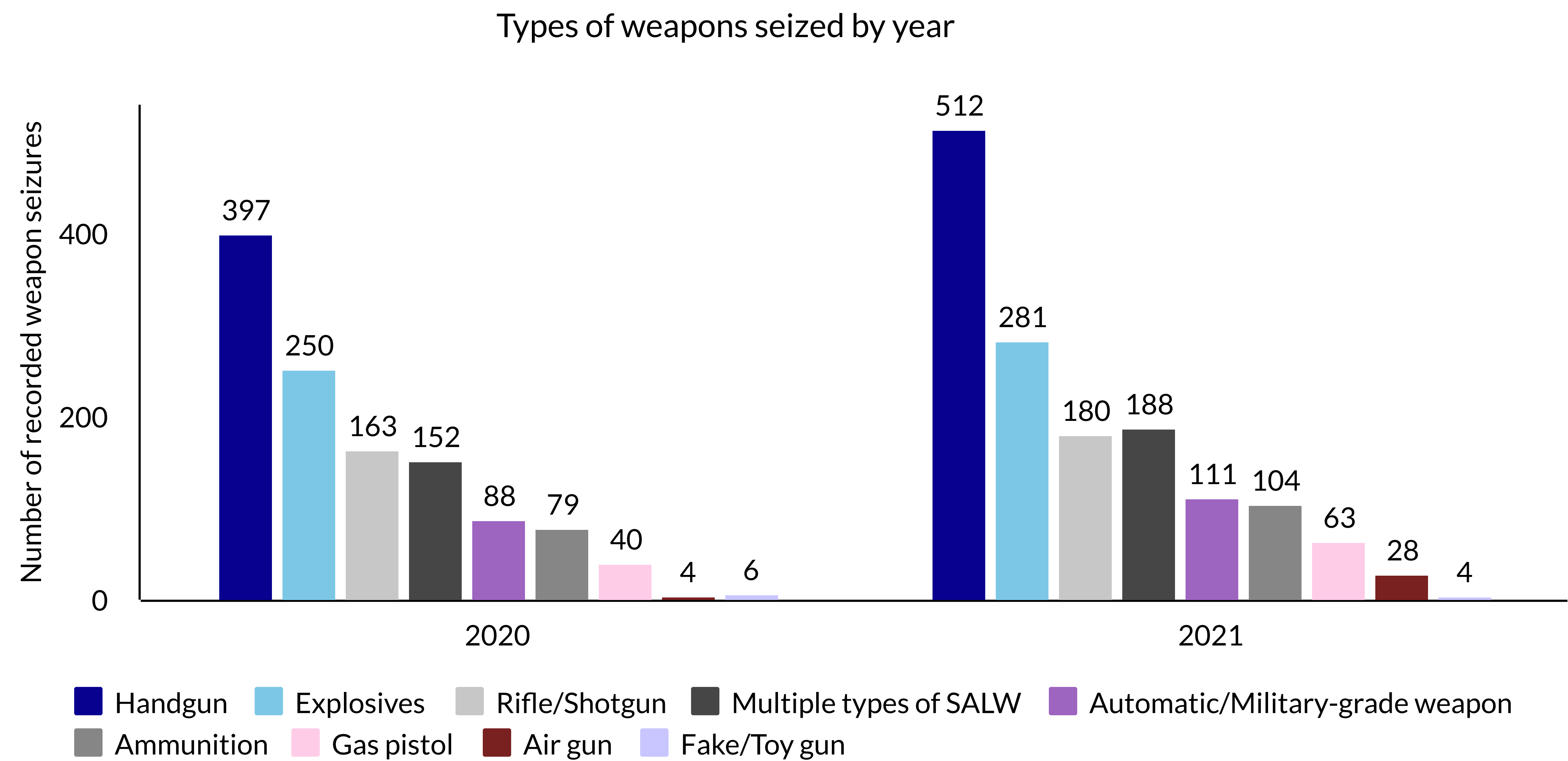
Location	 Home/Yard	 Street	 Field	 Cafe	 Forest	 Border
Albania	46	28	0	9	0	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	96	38	0	5	2	0
Kosovo	199	146	27	10	11	1
Moldova	21	8	11	0	6	11
Montenegro	50	17	0	1	4	1
North Macedonia	105	37	13	0	0	2
Serbia	126	20	0	0	0	4
	643	294	51	25	23	20



## 2. TYPES OF WEAPONS

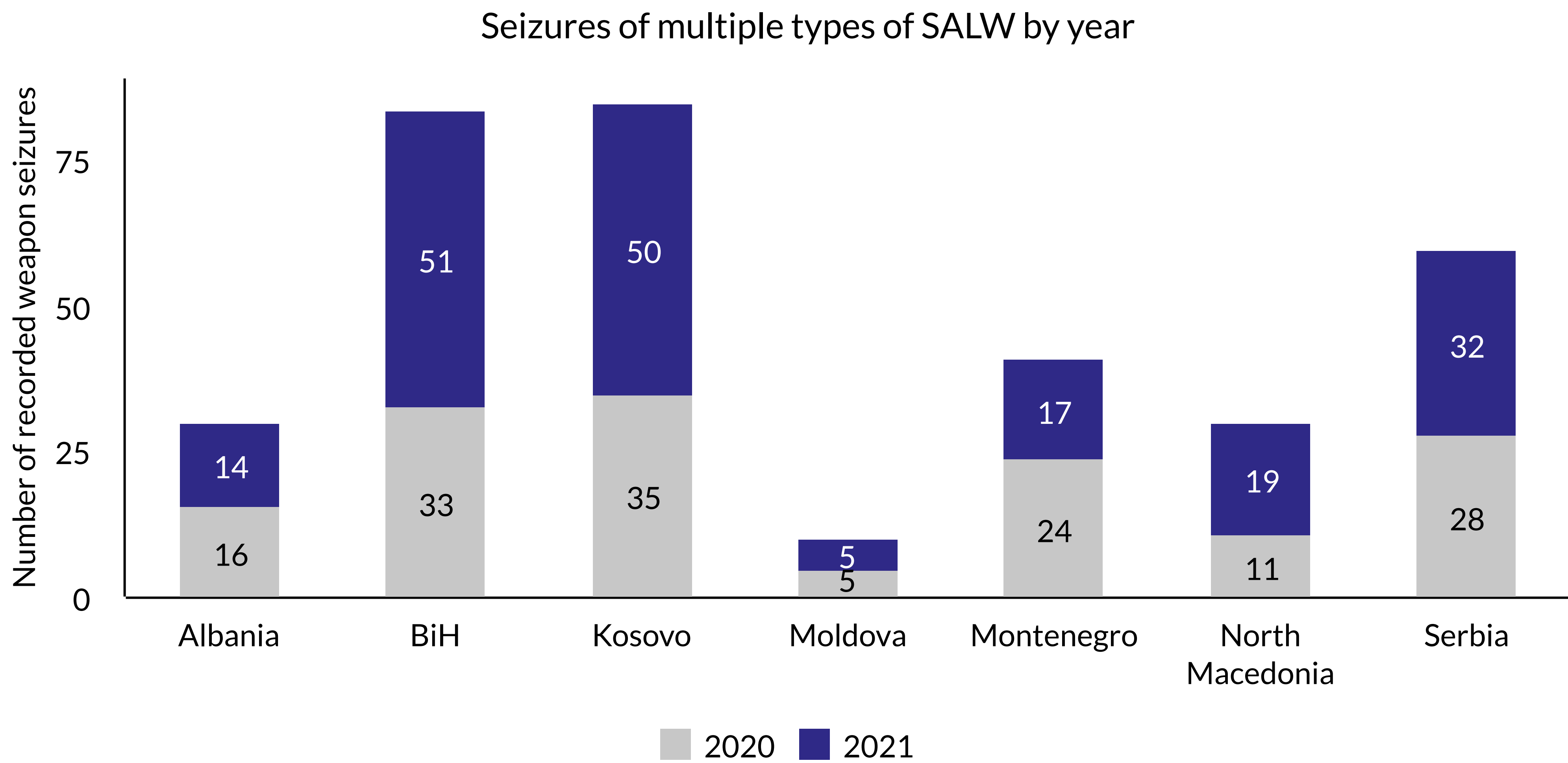
### 2.1 Weapon seizures by type of weapon

Weapon seizures involve seizures of a single type of weapon, multiple types of SALW, ammunition as well as cases when the type of weapon was not specified. In 2021, the type of weapon was either unknown or not reported in 67 (4%) cases. The trends observed in the seizures of a single type of weapon in 2020 continued in 2021 regarding all types of weapons. In both years, handguns were the most seized weapon, followed by explosives. An increase was seen in the seizure of all types of weapons, except for fake/toy guns.



### 2.2 Seizures of multiple types of SALW

The seizure of multiple types of SALW involves taking hold of more than one type of weapon. In 2021, the number of such cases increased by 22%, i.e. from 152 to 188 cases, with Bosnia and Herzegovina (51), Kosovo (50) and Serbia (32) reporting the highest number of such cases. In 37 cases, more than three types of weapons were siezed.

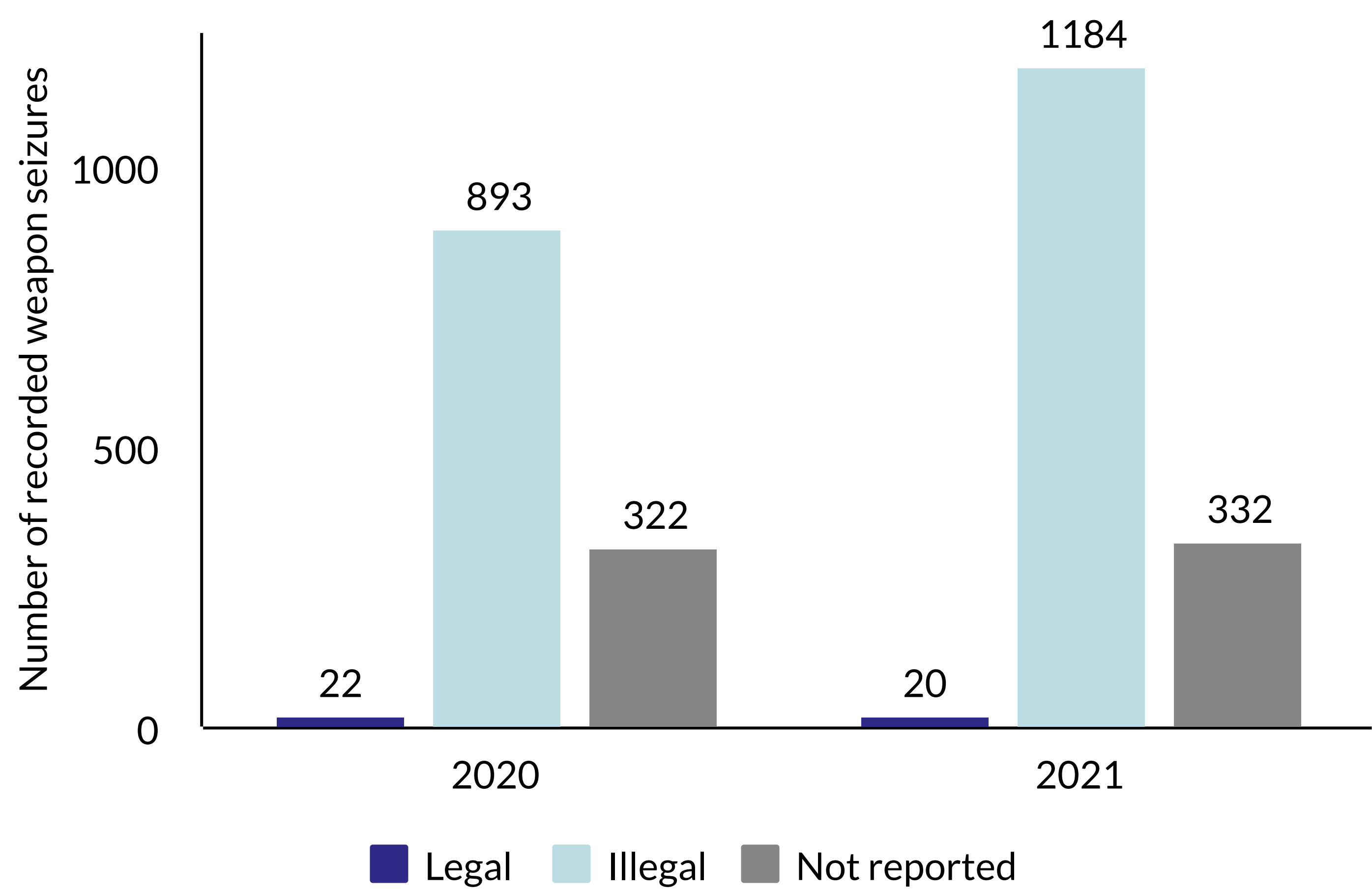




2.3 Legal status of weapon possession

In 2021, the legal status of weapon possession followed a trend from 2020, with the majority of the seized weapons being in illegal possession. In 78% or 1,204 cases, the legal status of weapons was indicated, while in 22% it was not. When the legal status of weapons was indicated, in 98% of cases the weapons were reported to be in illegal possession, showing a 32% increase compared to 2020. In 2% of cases, the weapons were in legal possession.

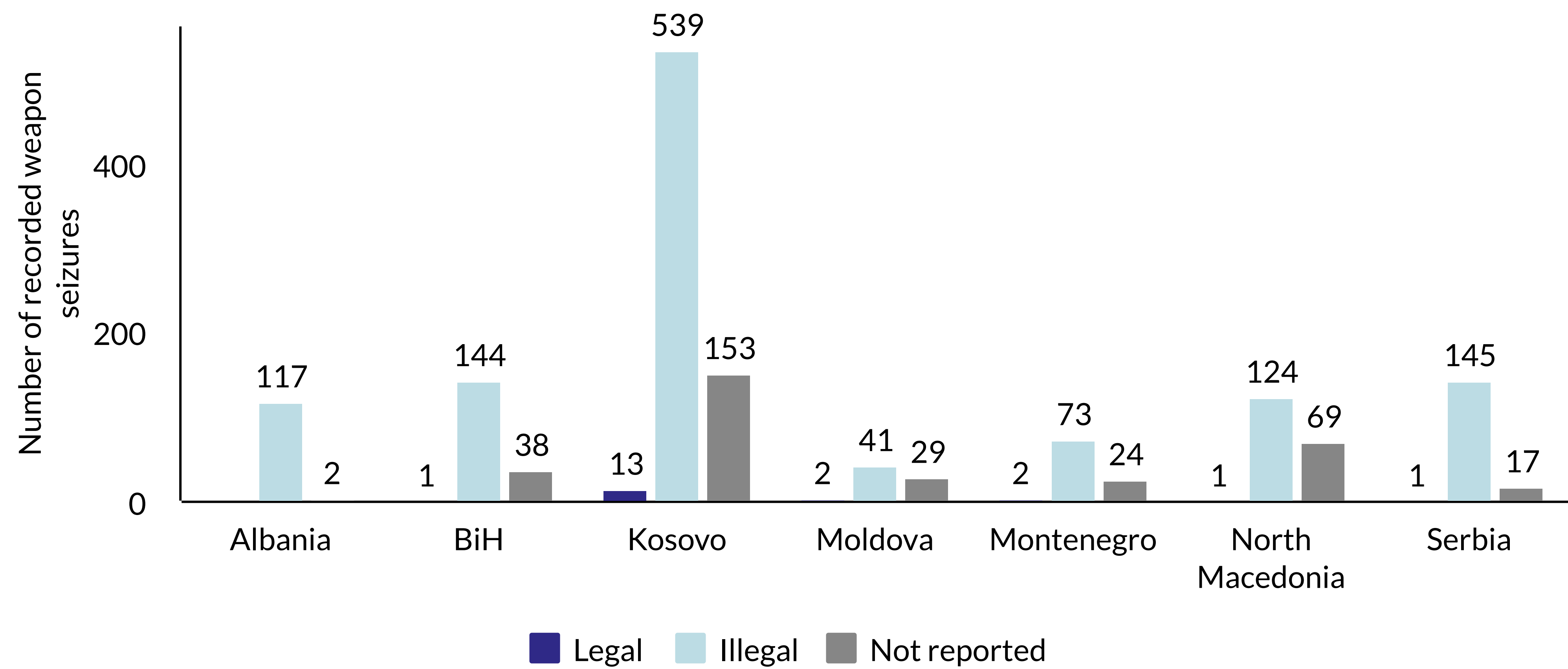
Weapon seizures by type of weapon possession by year



2.4 Legal status of weapon possession by jurisdiction

Cases of seized weapons in legal possession were reported mainly in Kosovo (19 cases), Moldova (2 cases), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1). In 325 (27%) weapon seizures, the type of possession was not reported. The seized weapons in legal possession were mainly rifles/shotguns (8 cases) and handguns (5 cases). Handguns accounted for nearly 40% of seizures of weapons in illegal possession, followed by rifles/shotguns and automatic/military-grade weapons. Seizure of weapons with an expired permit was reported in 10 cases, all in Kosovo, showing a decline from 2020 when 20 such cases were reported.

Weapon seizures by type of weapon possession and jurisdiction





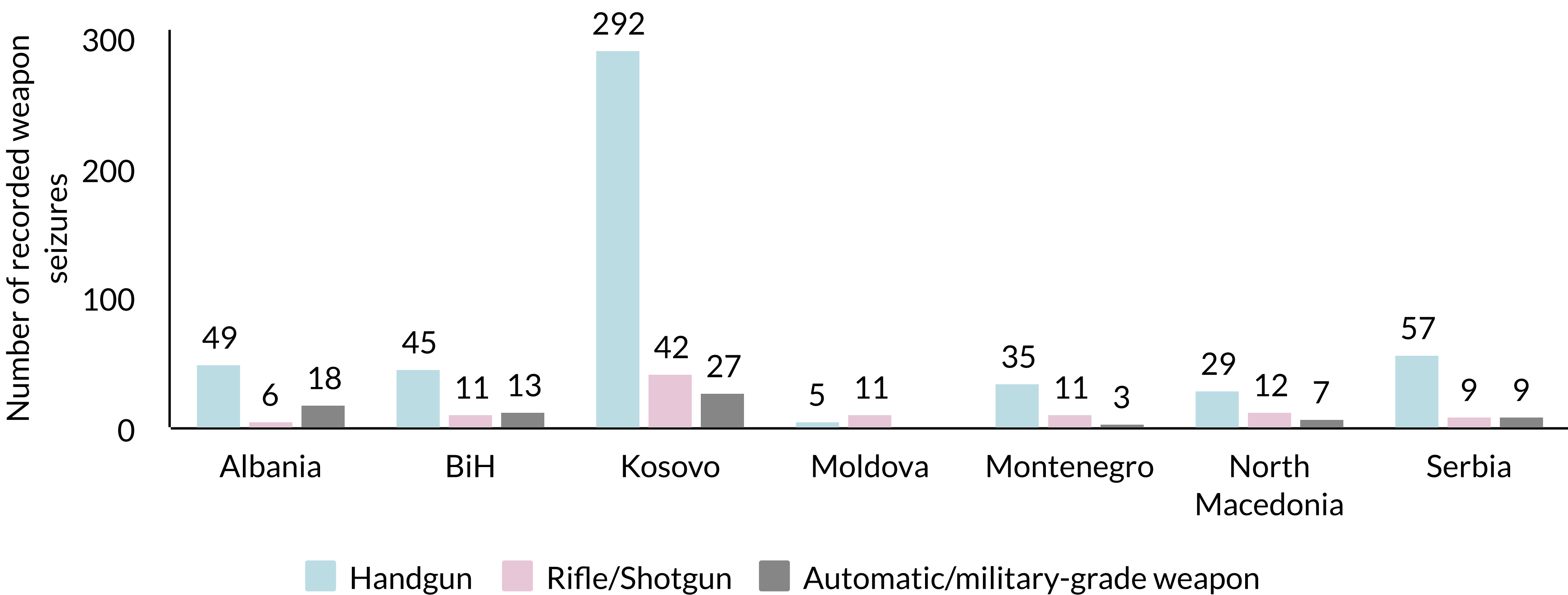
2.5 Ammunition

Ammunition was seized in a total of 930 (61%) cases in 2021, showing a 35% increase from 2020. However, ammunition was less frequently seized separately from weapons, i.e. in 104 (7%) cases. It was mainly seized in combination with another type of weapon, namely in 670 (46%) cases. In 156 (11%) cases, ammunition was seized with multiple types of SALW.

Location	Reported cases in which only ammunition was seized	Reported cases in which ammunition was seized with another type of weapon	Reported cases in which ammunition was seized with multiple types of SALW
Albania	4	62	10
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9	73	44
Kosovo	33	341	41
Moldova	10	26	4
Montenegro	8	46	14
North Macedonia	27	50	17
Serbia	13	72	26
Total	104	670	156

Among cases in which ammunition was seized in combination with another type of weapon (670), it was primarily seized with handguns (385 cases), with the exception of Moldova where ammunition was mainly seized with rifles/shotguns, i.e. in 11 cases, as was the case in 2020. It was seized with rifles/shotguns in 102 cases, which is 23% higher than in 2020. In 77 cases, ammunition was seized along with automatic/military-grade weapons, documenting a 40% increase from 2020.

The most common types of weapons seized with ammunition





2.6 Handguns

Compared to 2020, the number of reported handgun seizures rose by 29% in 2021. As the most seized type of weapon, handguns were reported in 633 (43%) cases.

As the only type of weapon, handguns were seized in 512 (35%) cases, while in 121 (8%) cases handguns were seized along with multiple types of SALW. Despite the increase, the trends in 2020 and 2021 were almost identical. Thus, the highest number of incidents in which handguns were seized both as a single type of weapon (292) and in combination with other types of weapons (38) was reported in Kosovo and the lowest in Moldova.

Location	Reported cases in which only handguns were seized	Reported cases in which handguns were seized with multiple types of SALW
Albania	49	6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	45	27
Kosovo	292	38
Moldova	5	2
Montenegro	35	11
North Macedonia	29	11
Serbia	57	26
Total	512	121

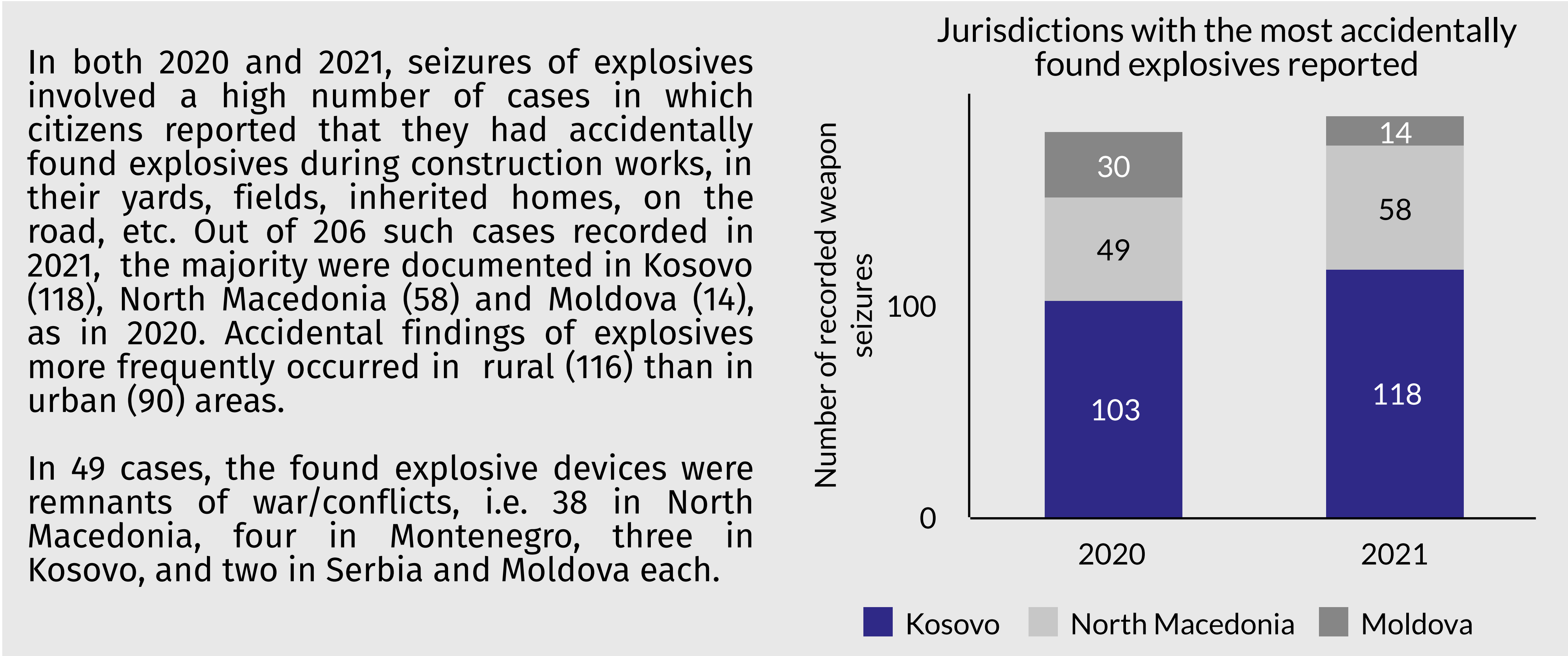
- The data on seizures of multiple types of SALW indicate that handguns were primarily seized in combination with rifles/shotguns, i.e. in 76 cases, and in 41 cases with automatic weapons. In 14 cases, the seizure involved all three mentioned types of weapons. The seizure of handguns and explosives was reported in 26 cases.
- When handguns were seized as a single type of weapon (512 cases), they were mainly in illegal possession, i.e. in 463 cases, while in five cases they were in legal possession. In 44 such cases, the type of possession was not reported. In 78% of cases, handguns were seized in urban areas. The microlocation data on handgun seizures show that they were mostly seized on the streets (154) and at homes (151). In four cases, handguns were seized in the border area.
- A total of 11 weapons were seized with a removed/obliterated serial number, six of which were handguns. In addition, in eight instances, handguns were seized by law enforcement agencies after the perpetrators had posted photos/videos of firearms on social media.



2.7 Explosives

Following the same pattern from 2020, explosives were the second most seized type of weapon, reported in 333 (23%) cases. The seizures of explosives rose by 8% from 2020. As the only type of weapon, explosives were seized in 281 (19%) cases, and in 54 (4%) cases, with multiple types of SALW.

Location	Reported cases in which only explosives were seized	Reported cases in which explosives were seized with multiple types of SALW
Albania	9	4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	21	24
Kosovo	120	6
Moldova	16	0
Montenegro	14	4
North Macedonia	78	2
Serbia	23	12
Total	281	52



- Hand grenades were among the explosives frequently reported as seized in both 2020 and 2021. In 2021, seized hand grenades were reported in 76 cases, showing a 15% increase from the previous year. In 54 such cases, hand grenades were accidentally found by citizens and reported to the competent authorities, mainly in Kosovo (31) and North Macedonia (17). Hand grenades were also reported as seized in 22 police raids, for example, in Serbia (9), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7), while Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro reported two each. One raid was reported in North Macedonia.
- Seized pyrotechnic devices were reported 27 times, which is 15% less than in 2020. North Macedonia continued to record the highest number of such cases (15). Seizures of pyrotechnic devices were also reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina (5), Serbia (3), Albania (3) and Montenegro (1). Nearly 90% of these seizures occurred in December, mostly in urban areas (22 cases), on the streets and shops.



2.8 Rifles/Shotguns

Being reported in 300 (20%) incidents, rifles/shotguns were the third most seized type of weapon in 2021, marking a 24% increase from 2020. As the only type of weapon, rifles/shotguns were seized in 178 (12.%) cases, while in 122 (7%) cases this type of weapon was seized along with multiple types of SALW.

Location	Reported cases in which only explosives were seized	Reported cases in which rifles / shotguns were seized with multiple types of SALW
Albania	13	10
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16	27
Kosovo	77	34
Moldova	18	3
Montenegro	17	15
North Macedonia	22	15
Serbia	15	18
Total	178	122

- Across all jurisdictions, the number of reported rifle/shotguns seizures increased, with the exception of Moldova where a slight decline was observed.
- In weapon seizures involving multiple types of SALW, rifles/shotguns were primarily seized with handguns (76 cases), automatic/military-grade weapons (37 cases) and explosives (22) cases.
- The same as in 2020, there were 26 reports of rifles/shotguns being seized in connection to illegal hunting, more precisely in 16 cases in Moldova, five in North Macedonia, two in Kosovo and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.
- In cases when the type of seized rifle/shotgun was known, a hunting rifle type M-48 was reported in 11 seizures, i.e. six such cases were recorded in Kosovo, three in Bosnia and Herzegovina and two in Montenegro.
- The seizure of a rifle Crvena Zastava was reported in six cases, while hunting rifle “Baikal” was seized in five cases.
- Voluntary surrender of rifles was reported in only one case in Kosovo.
- Rifles/shotguns were the only type of weapons that were more frequently seized in rural (92) than in urban (82) areas.

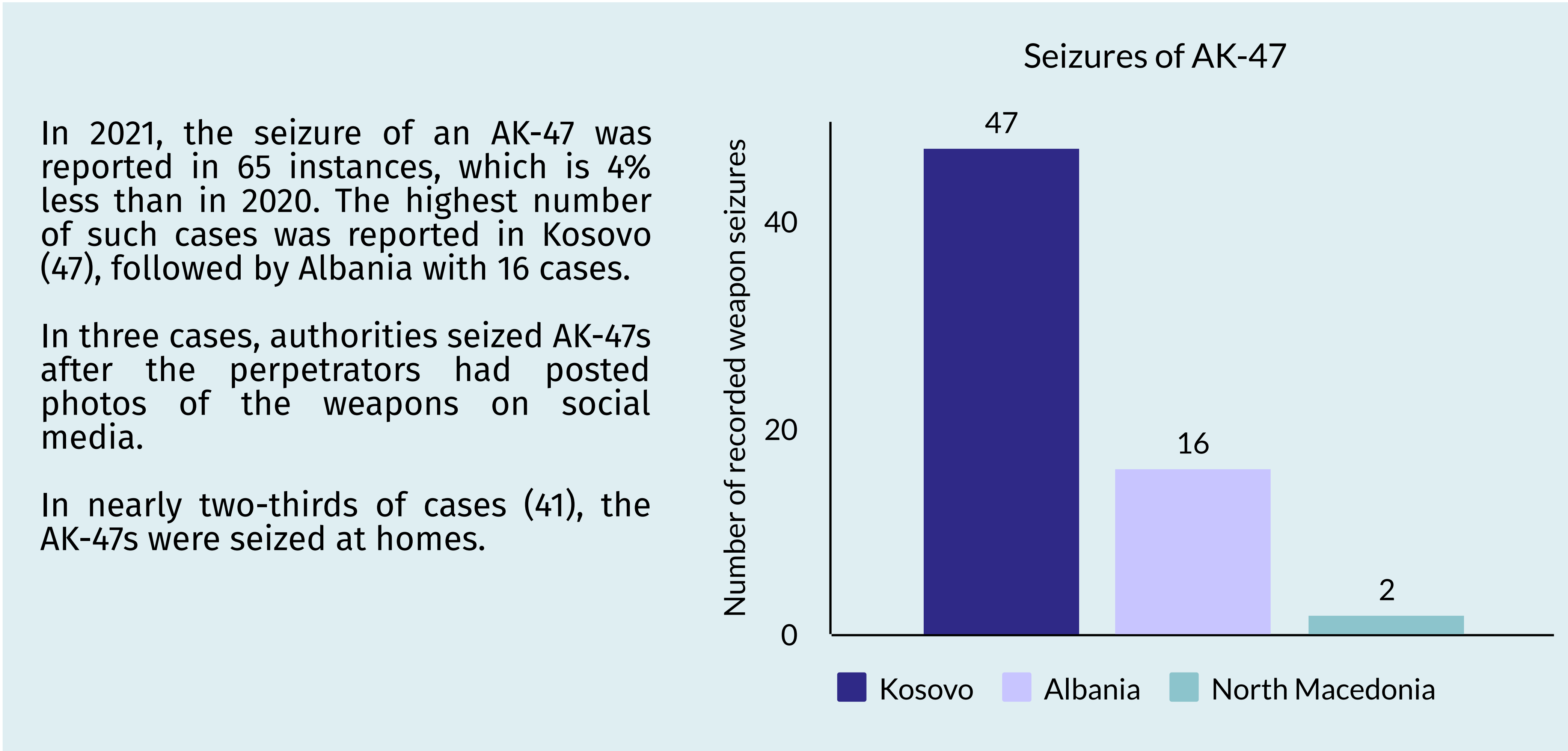


2.9 Automatic/Military-grade weapons

Seized automatic/military-grade weapons were reported in 190 cases in 2021, which is 21% higher than in 2020. As the only type of weapon, automatic/military-grade weapons were seized in 111 (8%) cases, and in 79 (6%) cases involving the seizure of multiple types of SALW.

Location	Reported cases in which only automatic / military-grade weapons were seized	Reported cases in which automatic / military-grade weapons were seized with multiple types of SALW
Albania	24	9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16	25
Kosovo	43	24
Moldova	0	0
Montenegro	4	4
North Macedonia	9	4
Serbia	15	13
Total	111	79

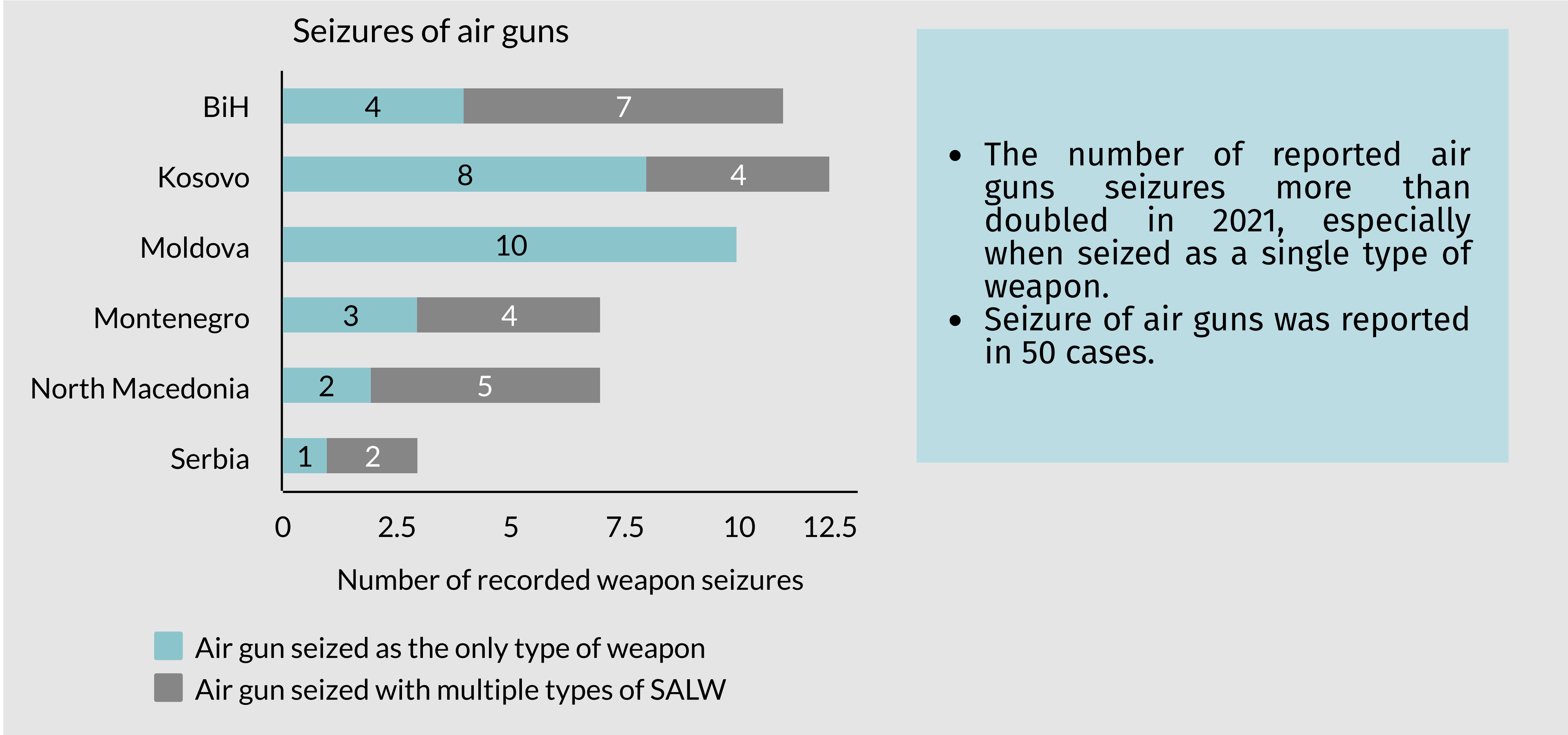
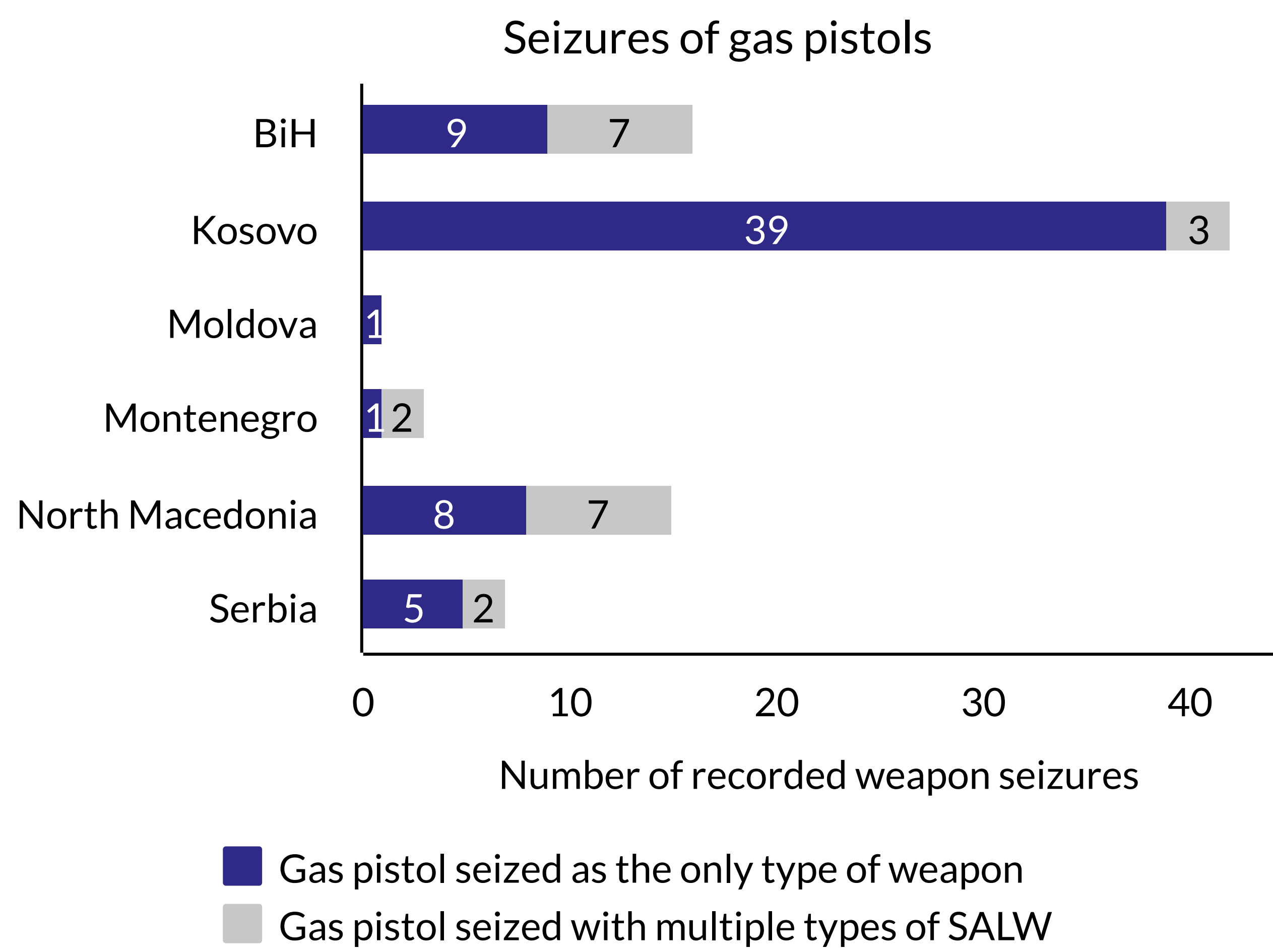
- All jurisdictions reported a rise in the number of seizures of automatic/military-grade weapons, except North Macedonia, where a slight decrease was seen, while no seizures of this type of weapon were recorded in Moldova.
- When seized as a single type of weapon, automatic/military-grade weapons were seized mostly in urban areas (69), and at homes (65).



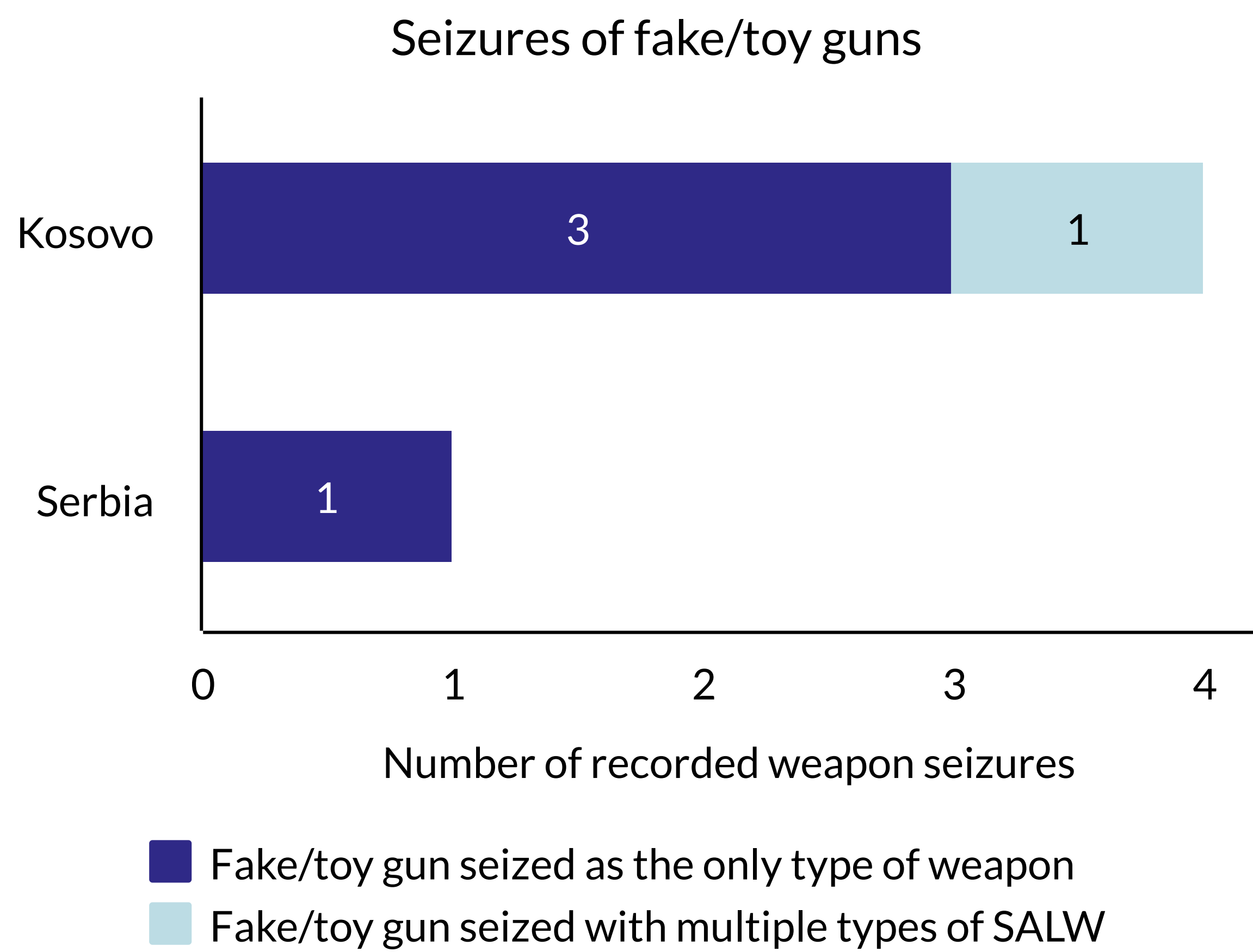


2.10 Gas pistols, air guns and fake/toy guns

- Compared to 2020, the number of reported gas pistol seizures rose by 45% in 2021. The increase was most notable in Kosovo.
- Gas pistols were seized in 84 cases. As a single type of weapon, gas pistols were seized in 63 cases.
- When the type of gas pistol was specified, Ekol was the most seized gas pistol, being reported in 15 cases, while Zoraki was seized in six cases.

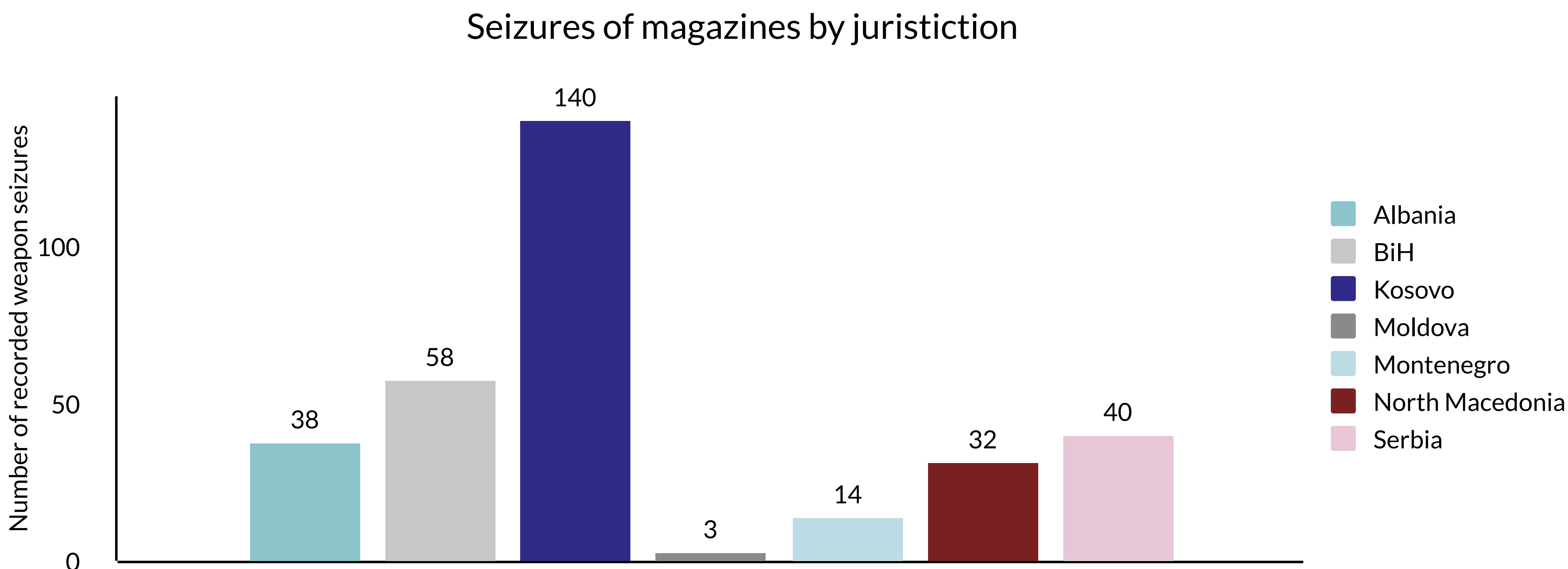


- The number of reported seizures of fake/toy guns slightly decreased from 2020.
- In 2021, the seizures of this type of weapon were reported only by Kosovo (4) and Serbia (1), mainly as a single type of weapon.



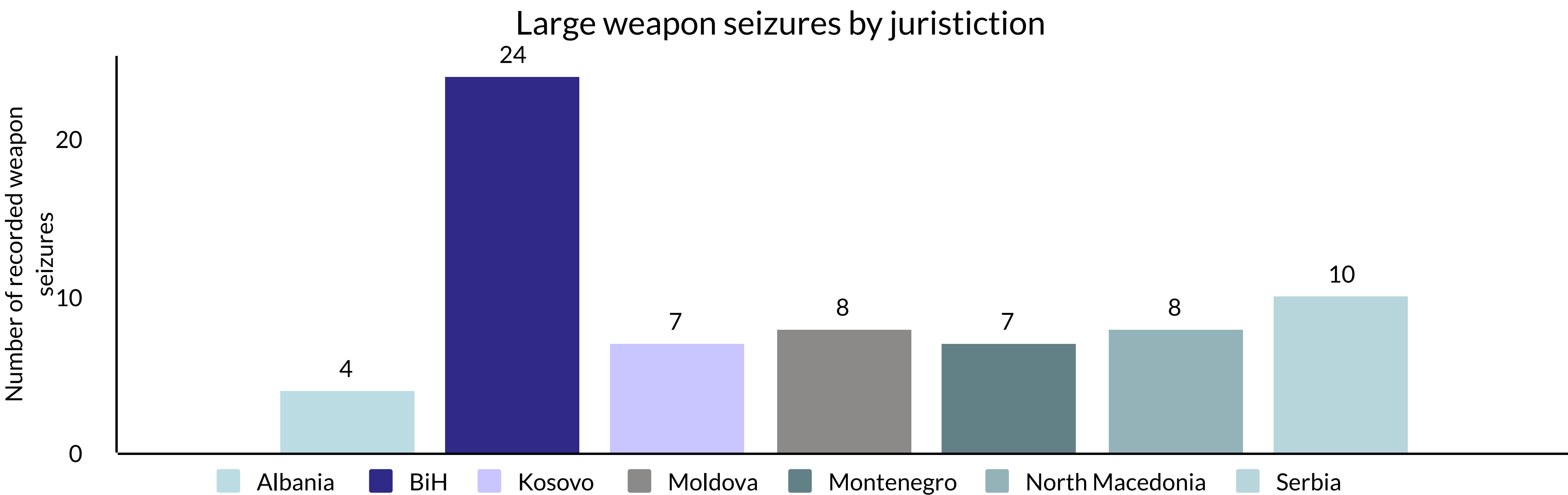
2.11 Seizure of weapon parts and components

Apart from weapons and ammunition, seizures often involve taking hold of weapon parts and components. As in 2020, magazines were the most seized weapon component, being reported in 325 instances, with Kosovo recording the highest number (140) of such cases. Among other commonly seized weapon parts were optical sights, seized in 19 cases, and silencers, reported in 12 cases.



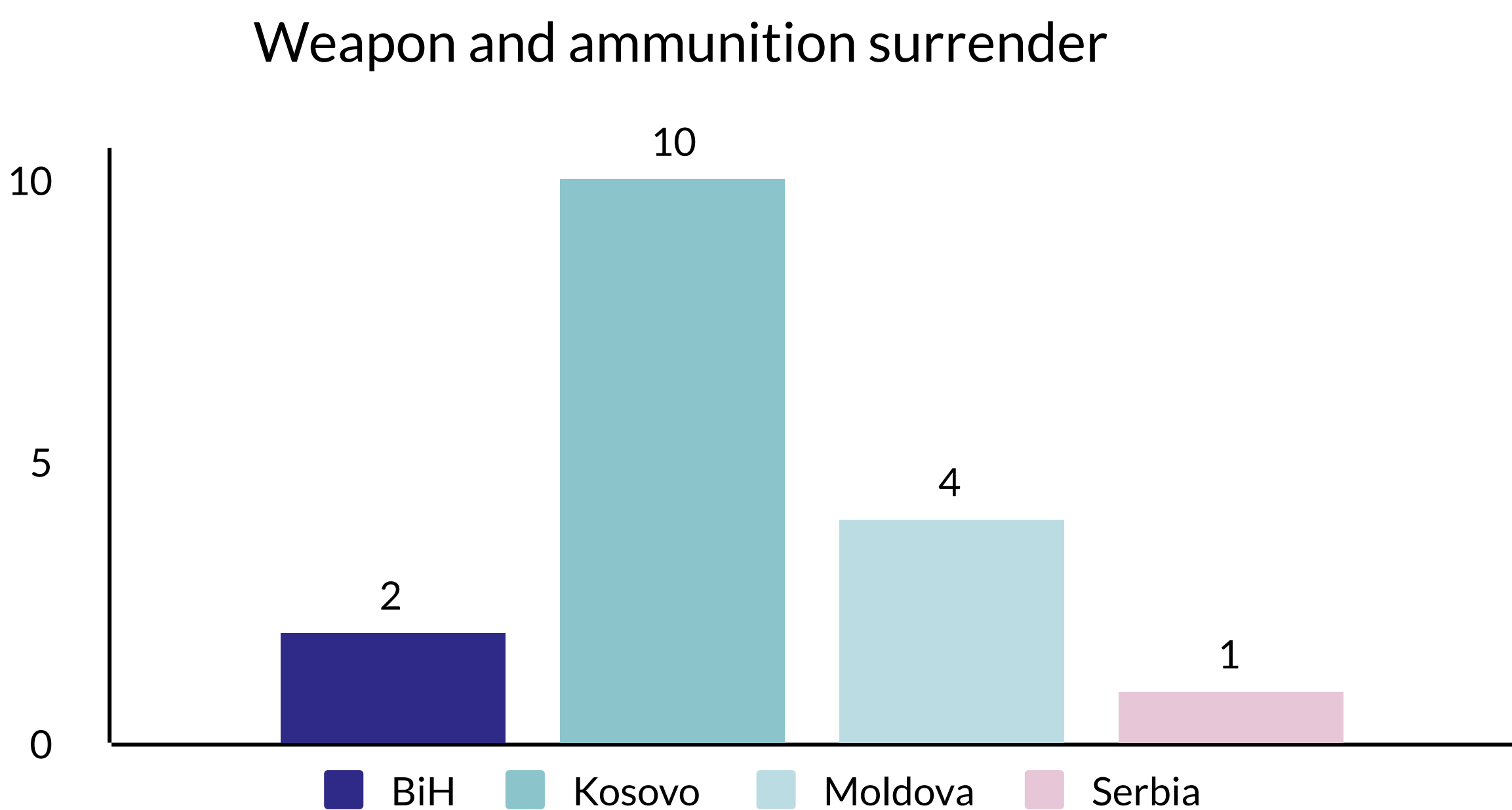
2.12 Large weapon seizures

Cases involving the seizure of five or more weapons (with or without ammunition) were reported 68 times across the region, 4% less than in 2020. Bosnia and Herzegovina (24) reported the highest number of such cases, with a 60% increase since 2020. Serbia (10), North Macedonia (8) and Montenegro (7) saw a minor decline.



2.13 Weapon and ammunition surrender

Voluntary surrender of weapons and ammunition was reported in 18 cases, slightly less than in 2020. Kosovo (10) accounted for more than half of all reported cases. Multiple types of SALW were voluntarily surrendered in four cases. Three cases, all reported in Moldova, involved the surrender of ammunition. Automatic/military-grade weapons were surrendered in three instances. Weapons were surrendered by 15 men and three women.





### 3. PERPETRATORS IN WEAPON SEIZURES

A perpetrator refers to any individual from whom a firearm/explosive/ammunition, as well as weapon components and parts, were seized by law enforcement owing to illegal possession, lack of proof of ownership, voluntary surrender, or as crime scene evidence.

A total of 1,595 persons were reported as perpetrators in weapons seizures in 2021. A 21% increase in the number of perpetrators from 2020 corresponds to the overall increase in the number of weapon seizures in 2021. The AVMP data reveals a strongly gendered aspect of weapon seizures, given that the men make up the majority of perpetrators whose sex was recorded.

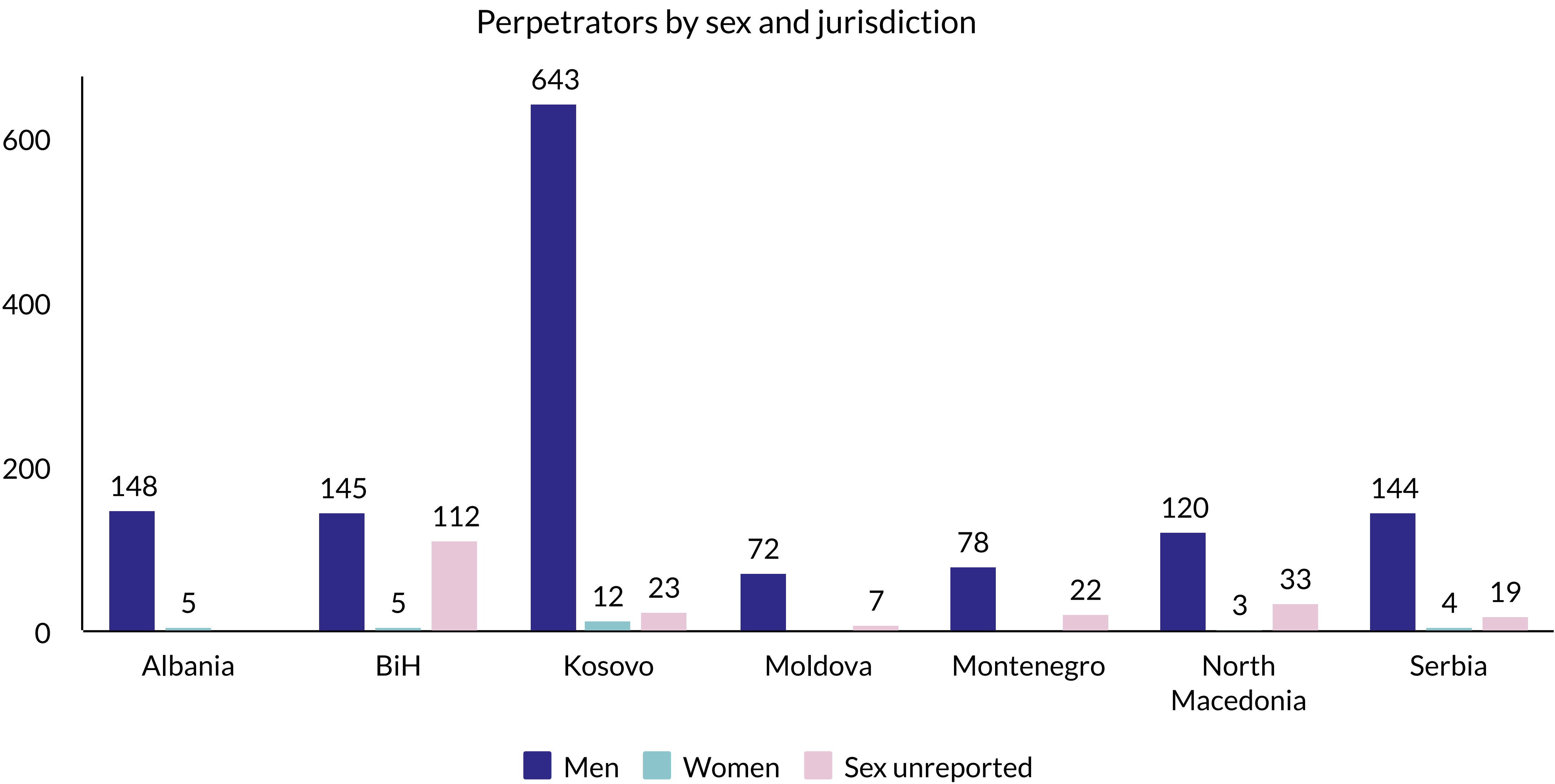
In 82% of cases (1,261), the perpetrators were reported as caught, while in 16% of cases (231) the perpetrators remained unknown. The perpetrators were known but not caught in 33 (2%) cases.

#### 3.1 Perpetrators by sex

Out of 1,595 perpetrators, sex was reported for 1,379 (86%) perpetrators, of whom 1,350 (98%) were men, and 29 (2%) were women. The sex was not indicated for 204 (14%) perpetrators. A similar trend was also documented in 2020.

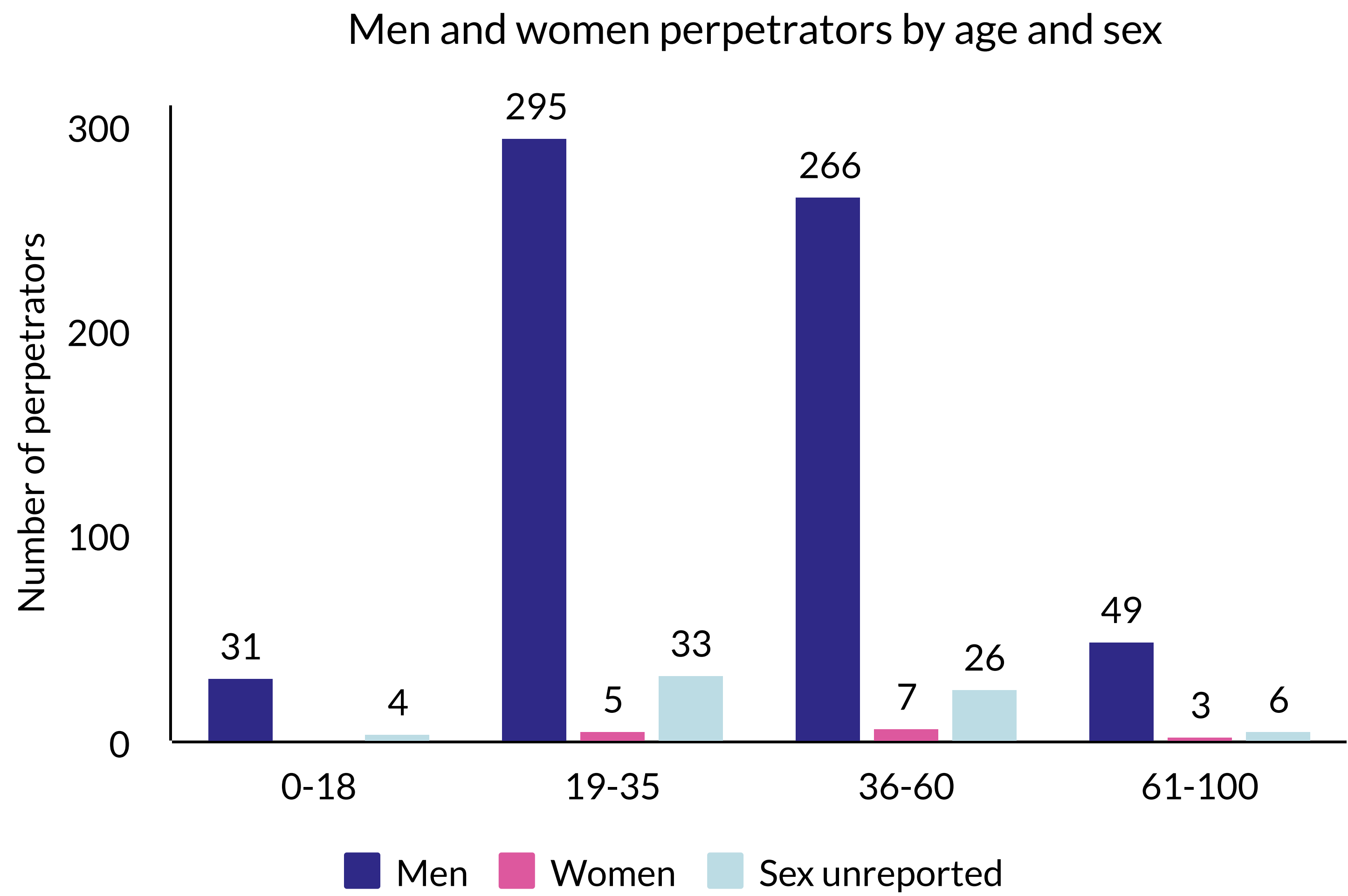
Men as the predominant perpetrators in weapon seizures acted alone in 1,011 cases, while in others they partnered with other men or women.

Women perpetrators were reported in 28 incidents. As sole perpetrators, women were involved in 18 weapon seizures, while in other 10 cases they acted with one or more men/women. No women perpetrators were reported in Moldova and Montenegro.



### 3.2 Perpetrators by age

The age of 725 (46%) perpetrators was indicated. Among perpetrators whose age was known, two age groups stand out, thus accounting for the majority of perpetrators - those aged 19-35 (333), and those (299) in the 36-60 age group. A total of 35 perpetrators aged 18 and younger were reported and 58 were aged 61 and older. For 870 (54%) perpetrators age was not reported. A similar pattern was seen in 2020.



According to the correlation between the perpetrators' age and the type of weapon, handguns were more frequently seized from perpetrators aged 19-35 (129) than those aged 36-60 (80).

On the other hand, explosives were more commonly seized from perpetrators in the age group 36-60 (30) than in the age group 19-35 (19).

The perpetrators in these two age groups have a similar share when it comes to the seizure of rifles/shotguns, automatic/military-grade weapons, multiple types of SALW and ammunition.

Those aged 18 and younger were mainly associated with seizures of handguns (10), multiple types of SALW (7) and rifles/shotguns (5).

Perpetrators aged 61 and older were reported in the seizures of multiple types of firearms (15), handguns (11), automatic/military-grade weapons (7) and rifles/shotguns (7).

Men dominate in all the above age groups. Women were mainly connected to the seizures of handguns (8) and rifles/shotguns (6).

## 4. VICTIMS IN WEAPON SEIZURES

In 2021, no victims were reported in connection to weapon seizures, in contrast to 2020 when six persons, three men and three women, were reported as victims.





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South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of  
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*This Project was funded by  
the European Union*

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