



*Issue No. 6*

# **EXPLOSIVES-RELATED INCIDENTS**

## **in South East Europe in 2020**

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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 **the explosives-related incidents** in South East Europe (SEE) as documented by the AVMP from **1 January to 31 December 2020**. As reflected in this report, the effects of the use of explosives<sup>1</sup>, whether accidental or intentional, can be devastating in terms of lives lost, injuries, property damage, and environmental harm. The cases covered by the report include seizures of explosives, including pyrotechnic devices, accidentally found explosives, explosions, suicides with the use of explosives, use of explosives in various types of incidents recorded in the AVMP, as well as perpetrators and victims.

### 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 the [EU Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2016/2356](#) and [EU Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2019/2111](#).

## HIGHLIGHTS

**424**

**explosives-related incidents** were recorded.

**306**

**cases of explosives seizures** were reported, accounting for **72.2%** of all explosives-related incidents

**55**

**victims** were reported in connection to **explosives-related incidents**.

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

Explosives are extremely potent weapons that can be used to destroy, incapacitate, harass, or distract. Their use can have disastrous consequences since explosives, when detonated, can injure or kill people and damage or destroy objects in the surrounding area.

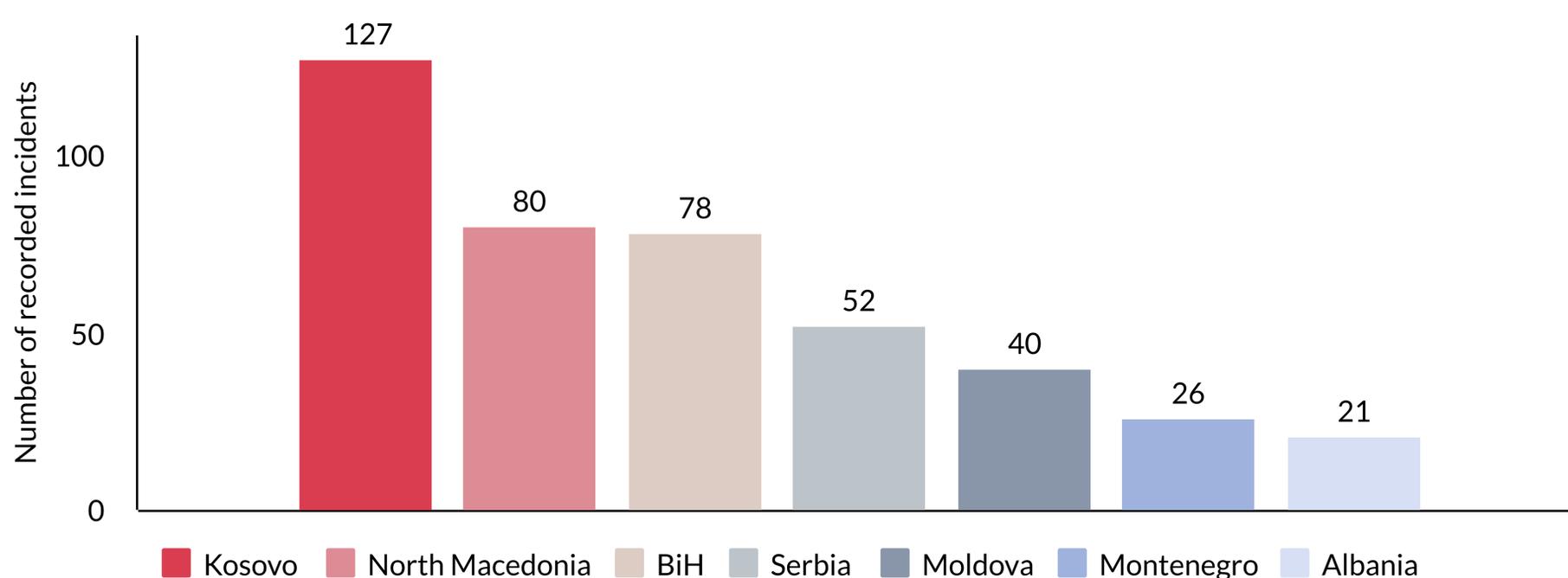
In this report, the term explosives refers to explosives materials, including bombs, hand grenades, grenades, remnants of war, unexploded ordnance, parts of explosives, explosive substances, pyrotechnic devices, etc.

In 2020, the AVMP captured 424 explosives-related incidents in South East Europe.

## 1. Explosives-related incidents by jurisdiction

The highest number of explosives-related incidents was reported in Kosovo (127), accounting for nearly 30% of the total number of such incidents, followed by North Macedonia (80) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (78).

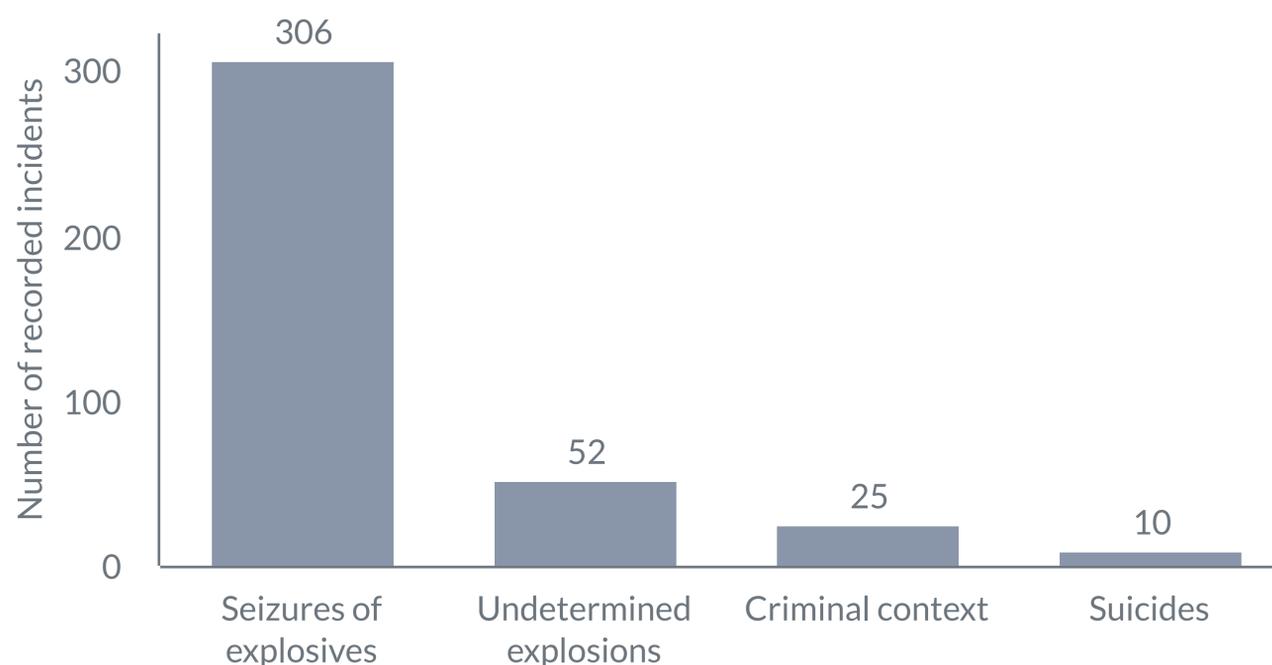
Explosives-related incidents by jurisdiction



## 2. Types of explosives-related incidents

In 2020, the AVMP captured various explosives-related incidents, with seizures of explosives being the most predominant type of incident, comprising 72.2% (306) of all explosives-related incidents. In 52 cases, explosives were used in explosions that occurred under undetermined circumstances. Explosives were also used in the criminal context and for suicides. The use of explosives was less common in incidents such as domestic violence, public disputes, disputes with police etc.

Four most common types of explosives-related incidents



## 2.1. Seizures of explosives

Seizures of explosives are documented under the Weapon seizures, which is a separate type of incident category in the AVMP that captures all incidents in which a seizure was the main event.

In this report, seizures of explosives refer to all cases in which law enforcement agencies took hold of explosives for numerous reasons, including illegal possession, voluntary surrender, or as crime scene evidence. It also covers cases in which citizens reported that they had accidentally found explosives and notified law enforcement agencies about it.

Seizures of explosives arising from other types of incidents are not included in this section. Thus, a total of 14 seizures of explosives that ensued as the law enforcement agencies' response to firearm incidents in the criminal context, public disputes, domestic violence and other types of incidents are not covered in this part of the report.

Out of 1,236 weapon seizures reported in 2020, 306 (24.7%) involved the seizure of explosives. After handguns, explosives were the second most seized weapon. As the only type of weapon, explosives were seized in 240 (78.4%) cases, while in 66 (21.6%) cases, they were seized with multiple types of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

Location	Number of cases in which only explosives were seized	Number of cases in which explosives were seized with multiple types of SALW	Total
Albania	3	6	9
BiH	11	17	28
Kosovo	105	10	115
Moldova	27	7	34
Montenegro	4	14	18
North Macedonia	75	2	77
Serbia	15	10	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>306</b>

In all jurisdictions, except Albania and Montenegro, explosives were more frequently seized as a single type of weapon than in combination with multiple types of SALW.

More than one-third of explosives seizures were recorded in Kosovo (115), followed by North Macedonia with 77 cases. An approximately similar number of explosives seizures was reported in Moldova (34), Bosnia and Herzegovina (28) and Serbia (25).

When seized with multiple types of SALW, explosives were mainly seized with automatic/military-grade weapons (27), rifles/shotguns (27), and handguns (23). In seven cases, all four types of weapons were seized.

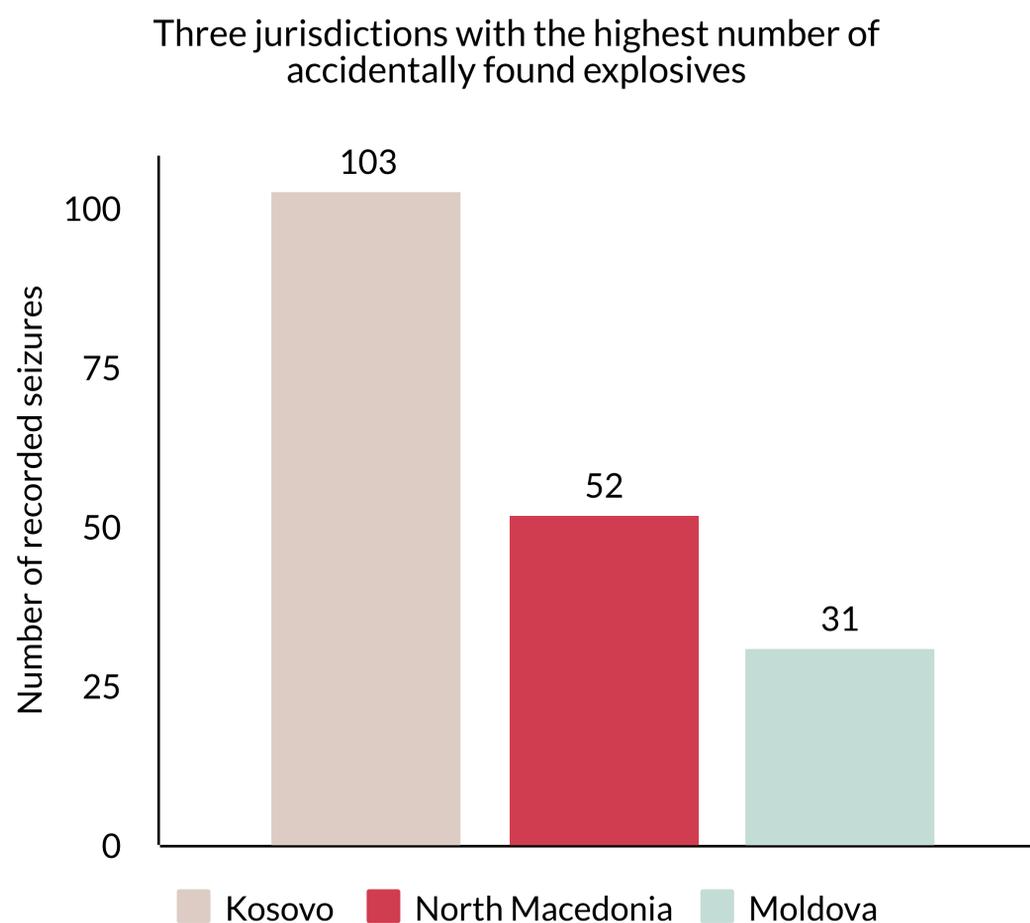
In 95.5% of all explosives seizures, ammunition was also seized.

A total of 157 perpetrators were linked to seizures of explosives, of whom 106 men and five women, while the sex was not specified for 46 perpetrators. When the age was specified, perpetrators were mainly aged 36-60 (56) and 19-35 (40).

In connection to these cases, two victims, a man and a woman, were reported; both were threatened with explosives.

## 2.1.1 Seizures of accidentally found explosives

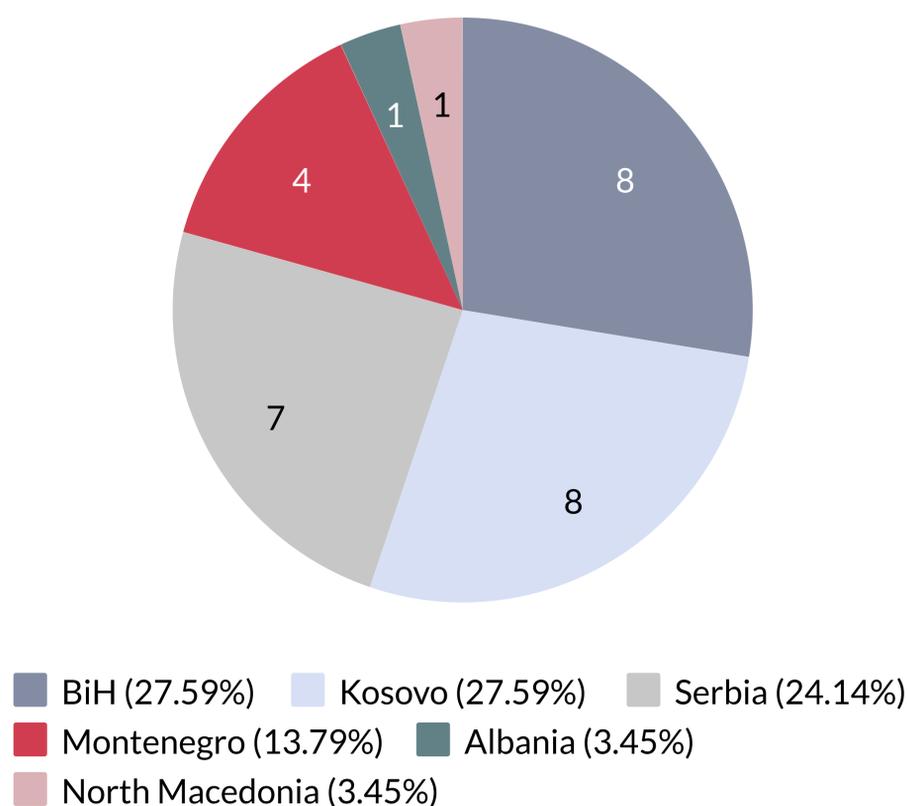
Seizures of explosives involve an exceptionally high number of cases in which citizens reported to the law enforcement agencies that they had found explosives by accident. More specifically, of all explosives seizures in 2020, a total of 199 such cases (65%) were recorded. In 192 (96.5%) cases, explosives were the only type of weapon found, while in seven cases (3.5%), explosives were found along with other types of SALW.



- More than half of these cases were reported in Kosovo (103), which is more than double the number recorded in North Macedonia (52) and Moldova (31). In the remaining jurisdictions, this number was less than ten.
- The relevant authorities determined that the found explosives were remnants of wars or conflicts in 40 (20%) cases, namely 21 in North Macedonia, ten in Moldova, and three in Kosovo.
- All explosives originating from World War I were found in North Macedonia (18 cases). Explosives from World War II (17 cases) were mainly found in Moldova (11).
- Among accidentally found explosives, hand grenades were commonly reported, i.e. in 49 cases, mainly in Kosovo (19), North Macedonia (16) and Moldova (10). In seven cases, hand grenades were remnants of war.
- According to the AVMP data, the explosives were mostly found during construction and excavation works or walks. In some cases, citizens found explosives in inherited and/or rented houses and flats. Citizens also reported that the found explosives belonged to their deceased relatives.
- These cases almost equally frequently occurred in both urban (104) and rural (95) areas. The most common places where the explosives were found accidentally were yards (32) and fields (32), followed by streets (25), homes (16) and forests (13).

## 2.1.2 Seizures of hand grenades due to illegal possession

Number of seizures of hand grenades due to illegal possession by jurisdiction



Apart from being found accidentally by citizens, 106 hand grenades were seized by law enforcement agencies in 29 raids across the region due to illegal possession.

Most raids were reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina (8), Kosovo (8), Serbia (7) and Montenegro (4), while Albania and North Macedonia reported one each. The seizures of hand grenades due to illegal possession in urban areas (24) were almost five times higher than in rural areas (5). They mainly took place at homes (16).

In the majority of raids (22), hand grenades were seized with other types of explosives or SALW, while in 18 of these cases more than one hand grenade was seized.

When the data on the specific type of hand grenade was known, mostly seized were M-52 and M-75 models.

Seizures of hand grenades involved 31 perpetrators, 23 men and one woman, and seven perpetrators of unknown sex.

## 2.1.3 Seizures of pyrotechnic devices

Reports on seizures of pyrotechnic devices were also common in 2020. There were 32 seizures of pyrotechnic devices, of which in three cases pyrotechnic devices were seized in combination with SALW. During such seizures, the law enforcement agencies took hold of dozens of thousands of various pyrotechnic devices, mainly fireworks and firecrackers.

The majority of cases took place in North Macedonia, where 24 (75%) seizures were documented. Other jurisdictions reported less than five cases, while seizures of pyrotechnic devices were not reported in Moldova and Kosovo. Almost all seizures of pyrotechnic devices (27 or 90%) occurred in December. The seizures mainly took place in urban areas (28), on the streets (20) or at homes (16).

A total of 38 perpetrators were linked to these seizures, apart from 13 perpetrators of unknown sex, 24 were men and one was woman, mainly aged 36-60.

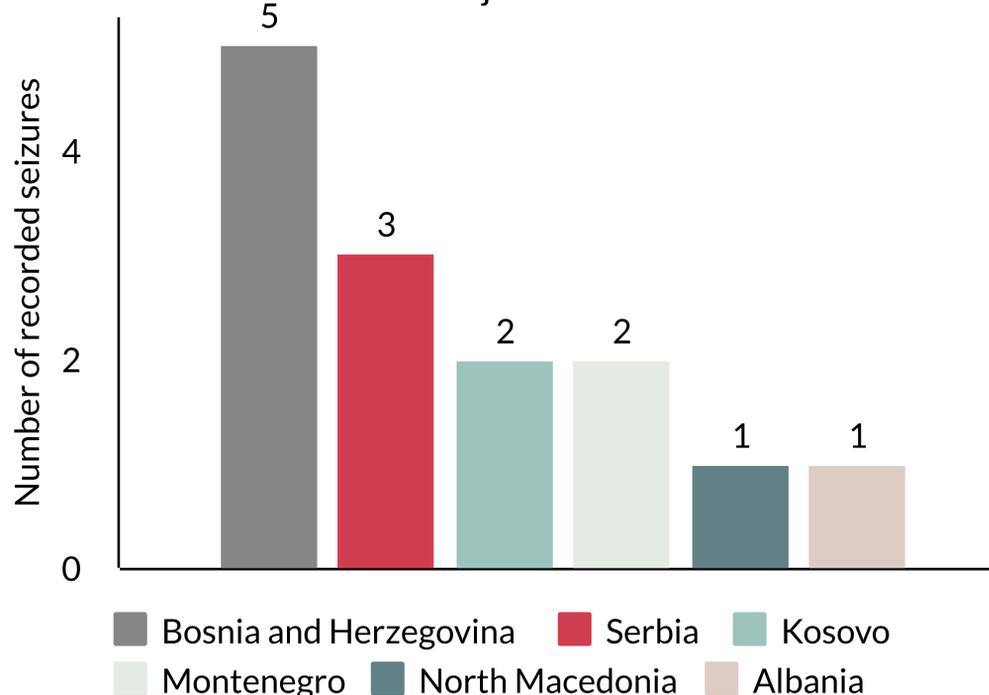
## 2.1.4 Seizures involving larger quantities of explosives and SALW

In 2020, 14 cases involving the seizure of five or more pieces of explosives and SALW were documented in the region. Bosnia and Herzegovina reported the highest number (5), while three or less were recorded in other jurisdictions.

Eleven seizures took place in urban areas, with homes being the most prevalent place where the seizures occurred.

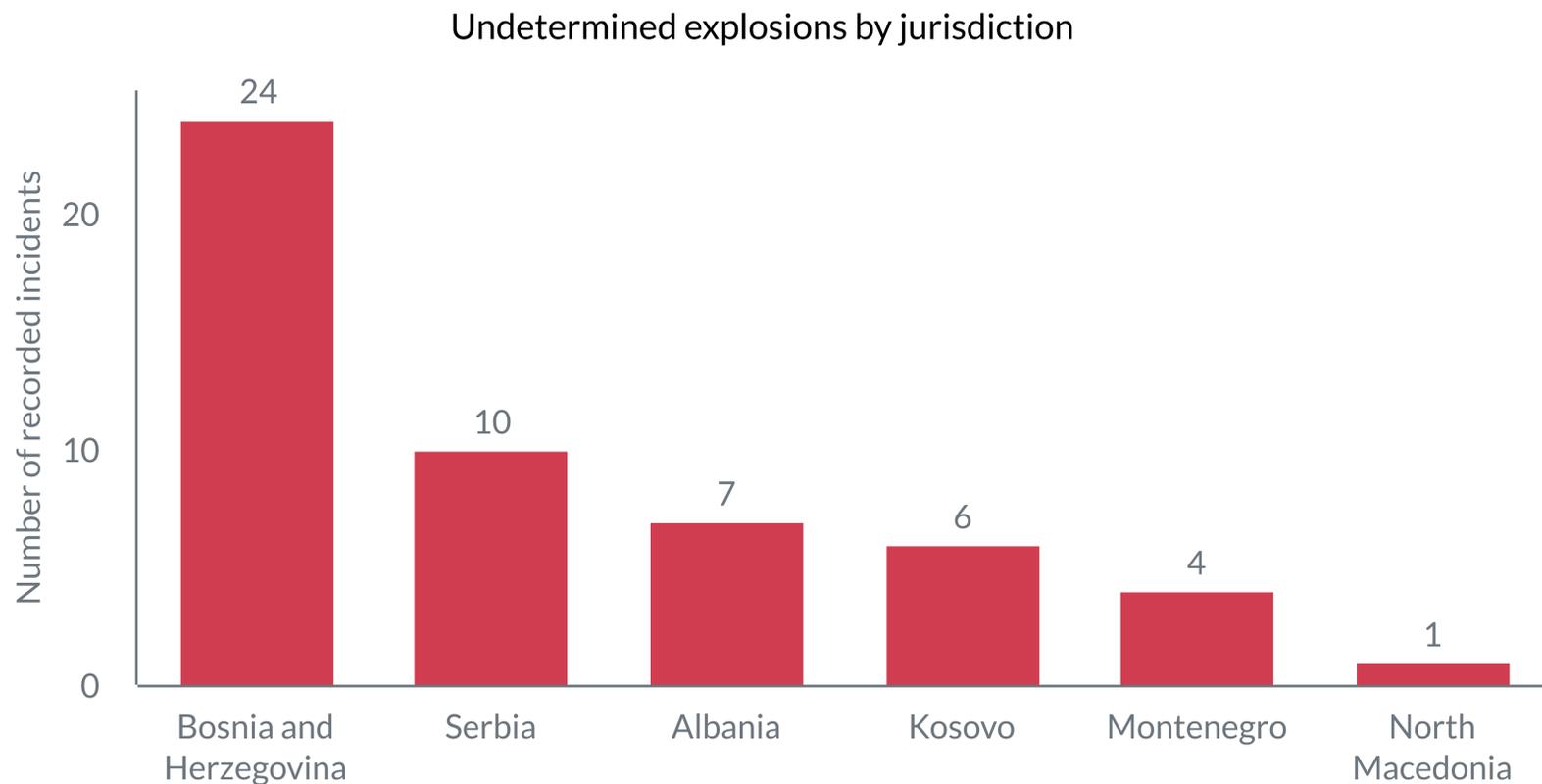
Fourteen perpetrators, of whom nine men and one woman were associated with such seizures.

Large seizures involving explosives and SALW by jurisdiction



## 2.2. Undetermined explosions

Undetermined explosions refer to all explosions that took place under unspecified circumstance and that, owing to the insufficient information provided about the context of the incident, cannot be clearly connected to any type of incident, be it a criminal or accidental activity, public dispute, domestic violence, suicides or other.

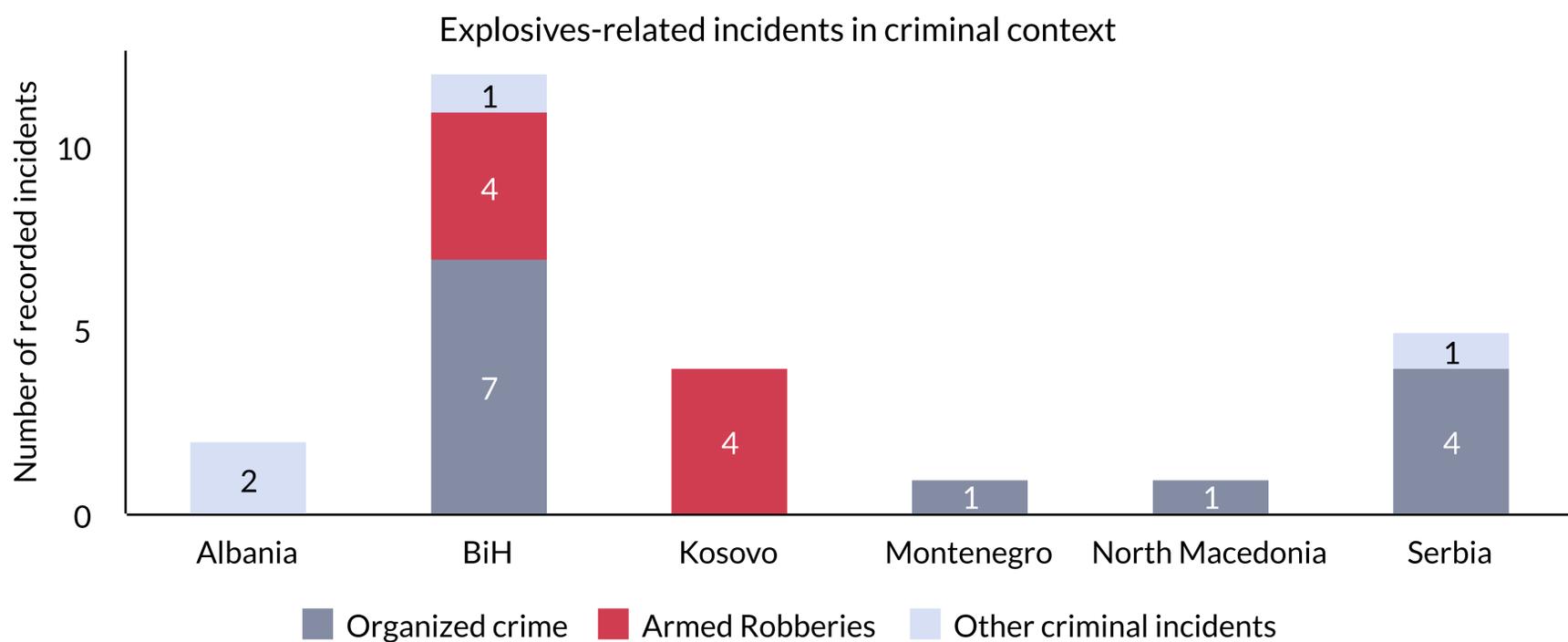


- In 2020, the use of explosives resulted in 52 explosions that occurred under undetermined circumstances. Nearly half of these incidents took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina (24), ten in Serbia, while other jurisdictions reported less than ten.
- In seven cases, explosions were caused by Molotov cocktails as reported in Serbia (3), Bosnia and Herzegovina (3) and Montenegro (7). The use of hand grenades caused six explosions, half reported in Serbia.
- 90% (47) of undetermined explosions took place in urban areas.
- When the microlocation was specified, the explosions occurred in streets (17), homes (10), and cafes/restaurants (6), but also public buildings, including municipal buildings.
- The AVMP data indicates that the reported incidents were more prevalent during the night (21) and evening (14).
- In 76.9% of undetermined explosions, the perpetrators were unknown, while in 11 incidents, they were caught. A total of 30 perpetrators were reported in connection to these explosions, 17 of whom were men. No women perpetrators were involved in undetermined explosions.
- Ten victims were reported as a result of undetermined explosions. One man was injured while nine people did not sustain injuries during explosions.

### 2.3. Explosives-related incidents in criminal context

The criminal context category consists of three subcategories: organized crime subcategory covering firearm incidents related to human, drug and weapon trafficking, organized criminal groups' clashes etc., armed robberies subcategory, and other criminal incidents subcategory that includes firearm incidents with a criminal background that are not associated with organized crime or armed robberies (e.g. kidnapping, planned assaults, etc.).

In 2020, the AVMP also captured the use of explosives in connection to criminal activities. A total of 25 incidents in the criminal context were reported, including 13 incidents linked to organized crime, eight armed robberies, and four incidents related to other criminal activities.



#### Organized crime incidents

##### *Illegal possession of explosives in organized crime*

- In ten extensive law enforcement operations combating organized crime, terrorism as well as drugs, weapons and human trafficking, explosives were seized along with firearms and ammunition. Six such incidents took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, two in Serbia, and one in Montenegro and North Macedonia. All incidents occurred in urban areas, half of which at homes. In these operations, 31 perpetrators were caught, eight of whom were men while 23 were of unknown sex. They were mostly aged 36-60 (12), and seven were in the age group 19-35.

##### *Explosions connected to organized crime*

- Three explosions, two reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina and one in Serbia, were linked to the organized crime milieu. One man died and one woman was injured in one of the explosions.

#### Armed robberies

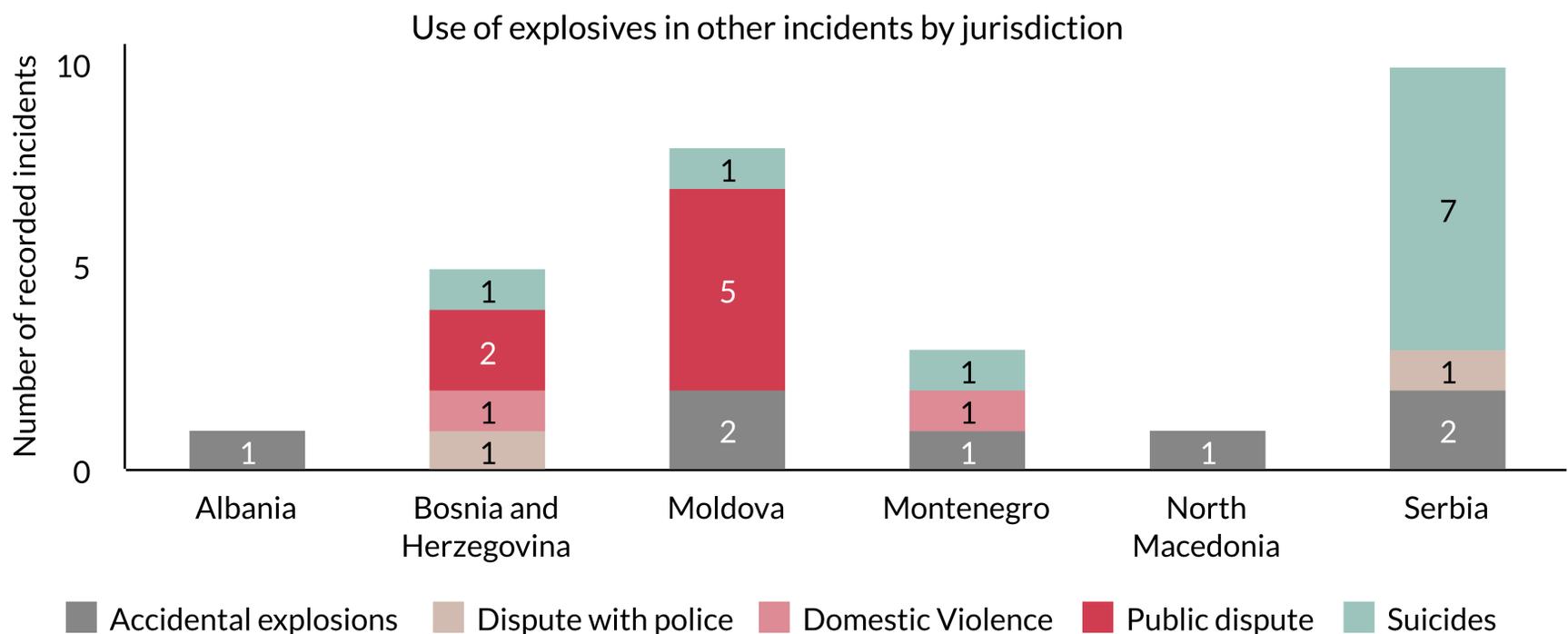
- Explosives were also used in eight armed robberies, with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina reporting four each. Namely, the perpetrators used explosives along with firearms to threaten shop employees during three robberies, while on five occasions, explosives were used to demolish ATMs (four in Kosovo and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Perpetrators were mainly unknown and not caught. All robberies involving explosives were committed in urban areas.

#### Other criminal incidents

- Four explosions were reported in connection to other criminal activities, mainly involving the use of explosives on the property of persons with criminal record or background. Two occurred in Albania, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia reported one each. In one of the explosions, three men were injured. The perpetrators were not identified.

## 2.4. Use of explosives in other incidents

According to the AVMP, explosives were also reported in suicides, accidents, in the context of domestic violence, public disputes and disputes with police.



### Accidental explosions

- In 2020, seven accidental explosions were reported.
- Four accidental explosions were a result of improper handling. Two such cases involved employees of units or legal entities dealing with explosives.
- In three explosions, citizens accidentally activated explosives they had found by chance. Two cases involved children (3) between the ages of four to six, and adolescent boys (3) who found unattended explosive devices and accidentally set them off.
- Accidental explosions resulted in 15 victims. Two men and a child died, and 12 persons, including two children, three young boys, one woman and six men were injured. Most (5) explosions took place outdoors, and two at homes.

### Domestic violence

- Two incidents with explosives in the context of domestic violence were reported in the region. One as a result of intimate partner violence, when a woman was killed by her intimate partner following a dispute, while in the other, a man was threatened with a hand grenade by a family member. In both cases, perpetrators (2) were men aged 61 and older.

### Suicides

- Ten men died by suicide using explosives. The majority of men were older than 61 (7). Half of the cases took place at homes. 70% of suicides occurred in Serbia.

### Public disputes

- Explosives were used in three cases following disputes among friends/neighbours/acquaintances. Consequently, two men were threatened with explosives, and one woman did not suffer injuries.

### Dispute with police

- The use of explosives was also reported in the context of disputes with police (2). In one case, a hand grenade was thrown at the police station, while in the other, a bomb was placed in the car of a border police officer. No victims were reported in connection to these incidents.

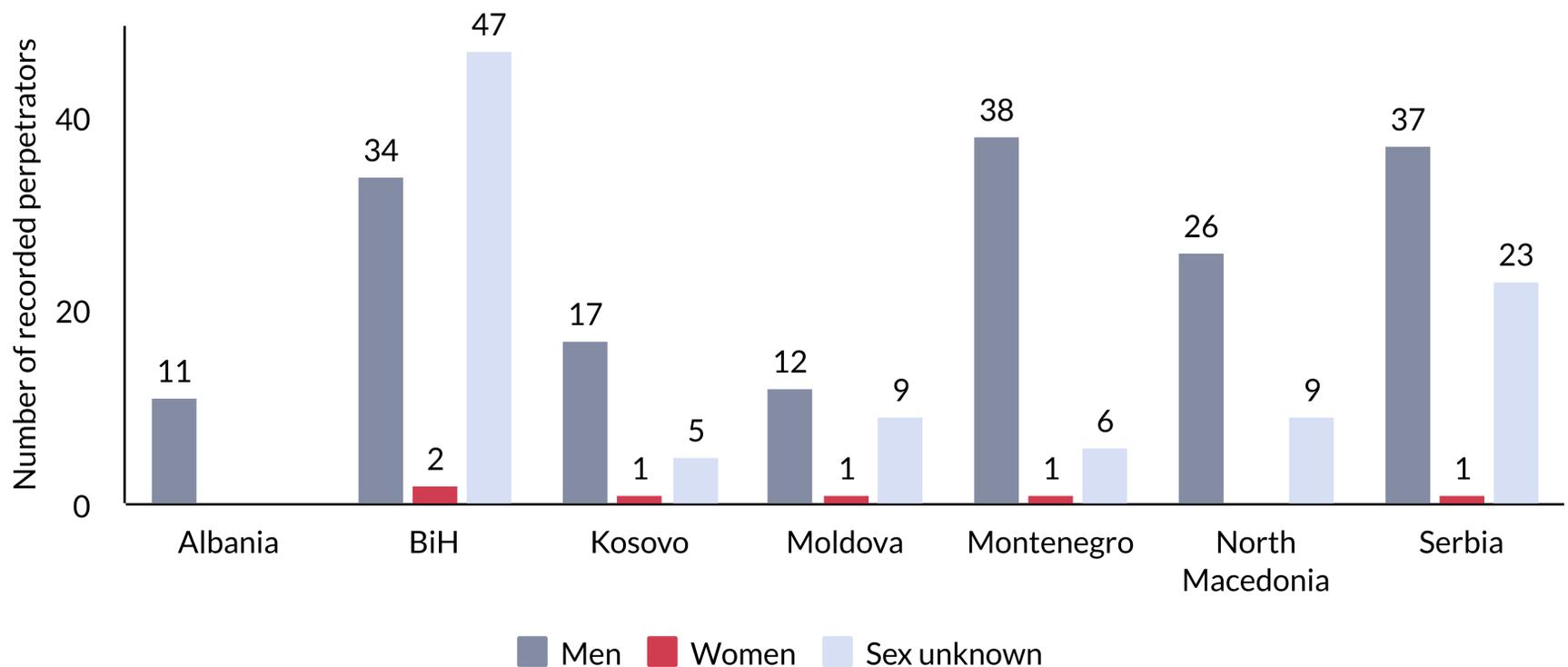
### 3. Perpetrators

A total of 280 persons were reported as perpetrators in explosives-related incidents in 2020.

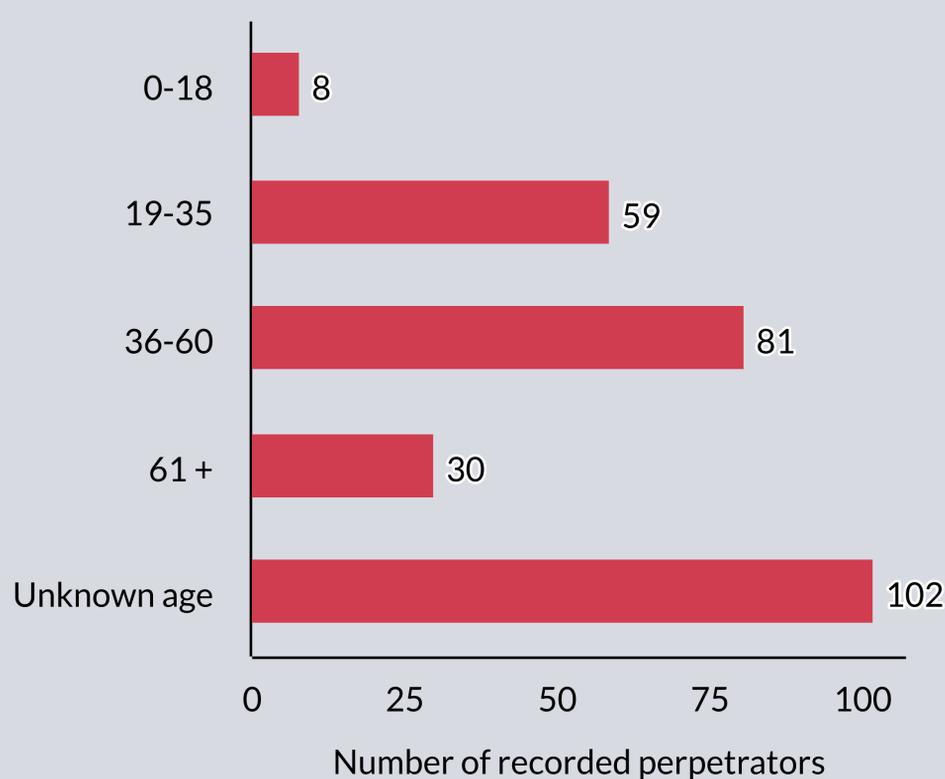
Perpetrator refers to any individual who used an explosive device to commit any of the types of incidents covered by the AVMP, but also those from whom an explosive device was seized by law enforcement owing to illegal possession, lack of proof of ownership, or as crime scene evidence, among others.

The AVMP data document a highly gendered aspect of the use of explosives, considering that men were the predominant perpetrators in incidents with explosives.

Perpetrators by jurisdiction and sex



Perpetrators by age

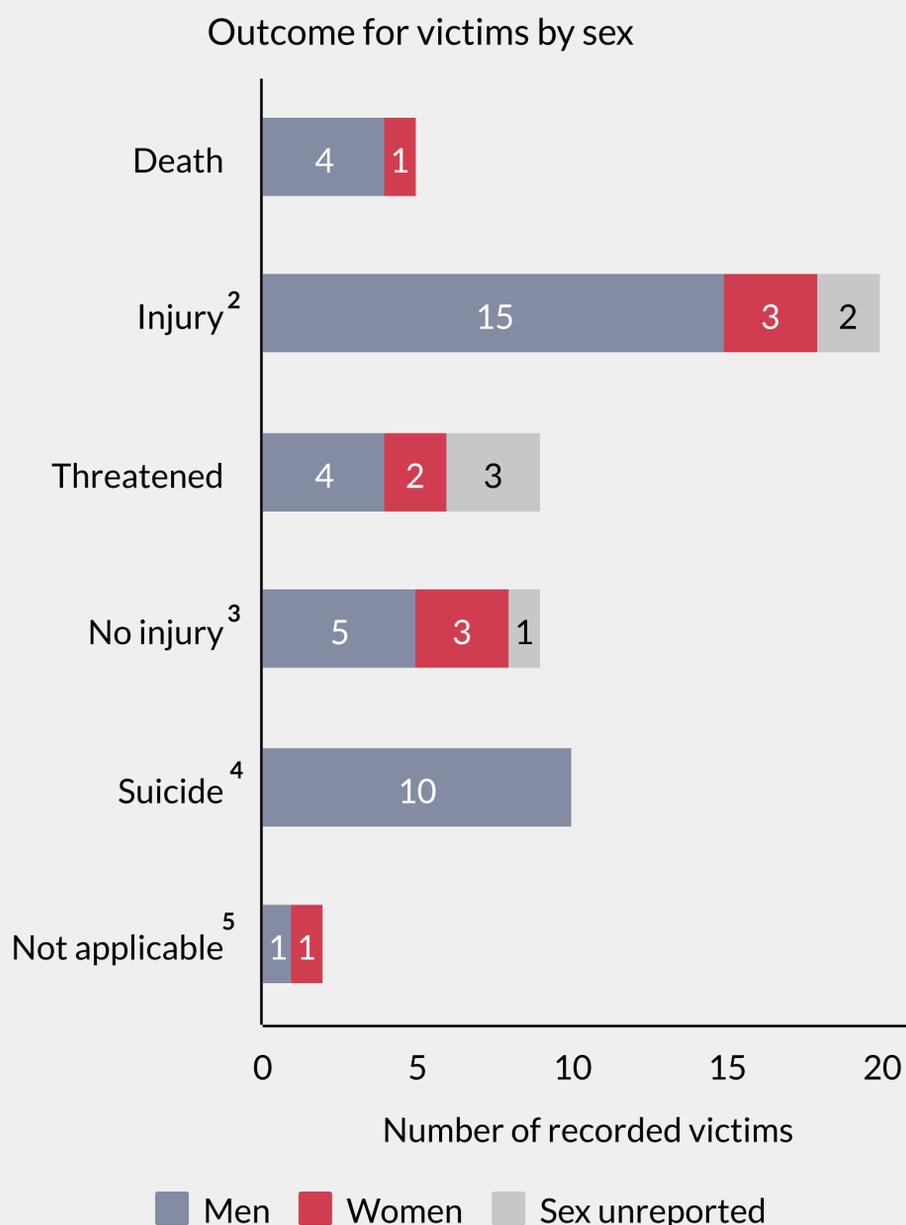
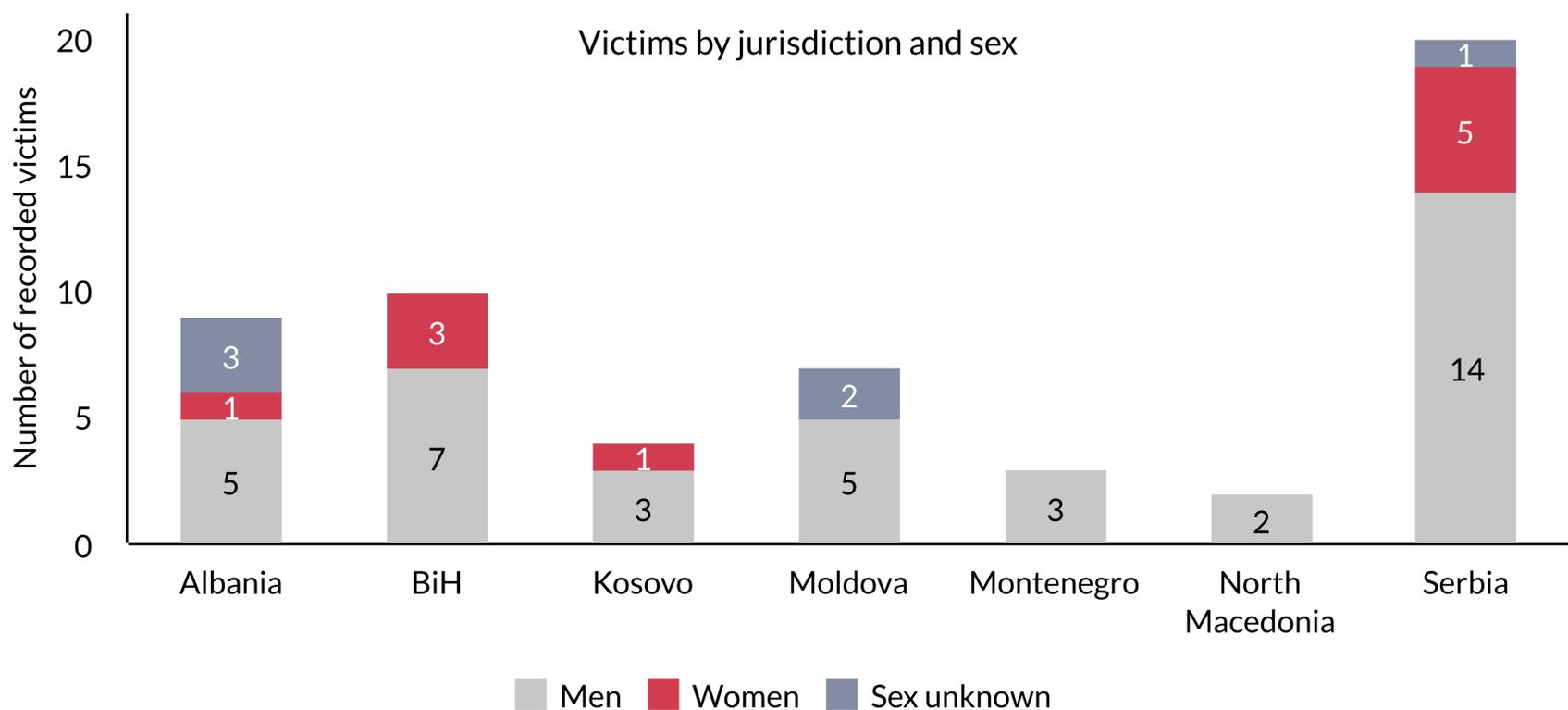


- Out of 280 perpetrators, 175 were men and six were women. For 99 (35.3%) perpetrators sex was not reported.
- The available data on the perpetrators' sex, indicates that men accounted for 96.7 % of all perpetrators, while women comprised 3.3%.
- In incidents where the age of perpetrators was reported, the majority fell under the age group of 36-60 (81), followed by the 19-35 age group (59).
- In 149 cases, perpetrators were reported as caught.
- More than half of perpetrators were linked to seizures of explosives (157 or 56 %), 92% of whom were reported as caught.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (83), Serbia (61) and Montenegro (45) reported the highest number of perpetrators.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kosovo recorded the highest number of explosives-related incidents, i.e. 127; however, 103 were reports of accidentally found explosives where the perpetrators were almost always unknown.

## 4. Victims

In 2020, 55 victims were reported in explosives-related incidents. Victim refers to any individual who has been threatened, injured or died as a result of the use of explosives in any of the types of incidents covered by AVMP.



- Out of 55 victims, 39 were men, and ten were women. For six victims, sex was not reported.
- Men accounted for 79.6% of all victims, whose sex was reported and women 20.4%.
- In incidents where the age of victims was reported, an almost equal share was observed among those aged 61 and older (13) and the age group 36-60 (12). Seven victims in the age range 0-18 and four victims aged 19-35 were reported. The age was not reported for 19 (34.5%) victims.
- Injuries were the most common outcome for victims and mainly resulted from accidents (12) and incidents in criminal context (5). Five fatal outcomes were reported in connection to accidents (3), domestic violence (1) and criminal context (1).
- The highest number of victims was reported in the context of accidents (15), undetermined explosions (10) and suicides (10).
- Three jurisdictions with the highest number of reported victims were Serbia (20), Bosnia and Herzegovina (10) and Albania (9).

<sup>2</sup> Injury refers to all incidents in which an individual sustained an injury due to the use of explosives.

<sup>3</sup> No injury refers to all incidents in which an explosive was activated, but the victim did not sustain an injury.

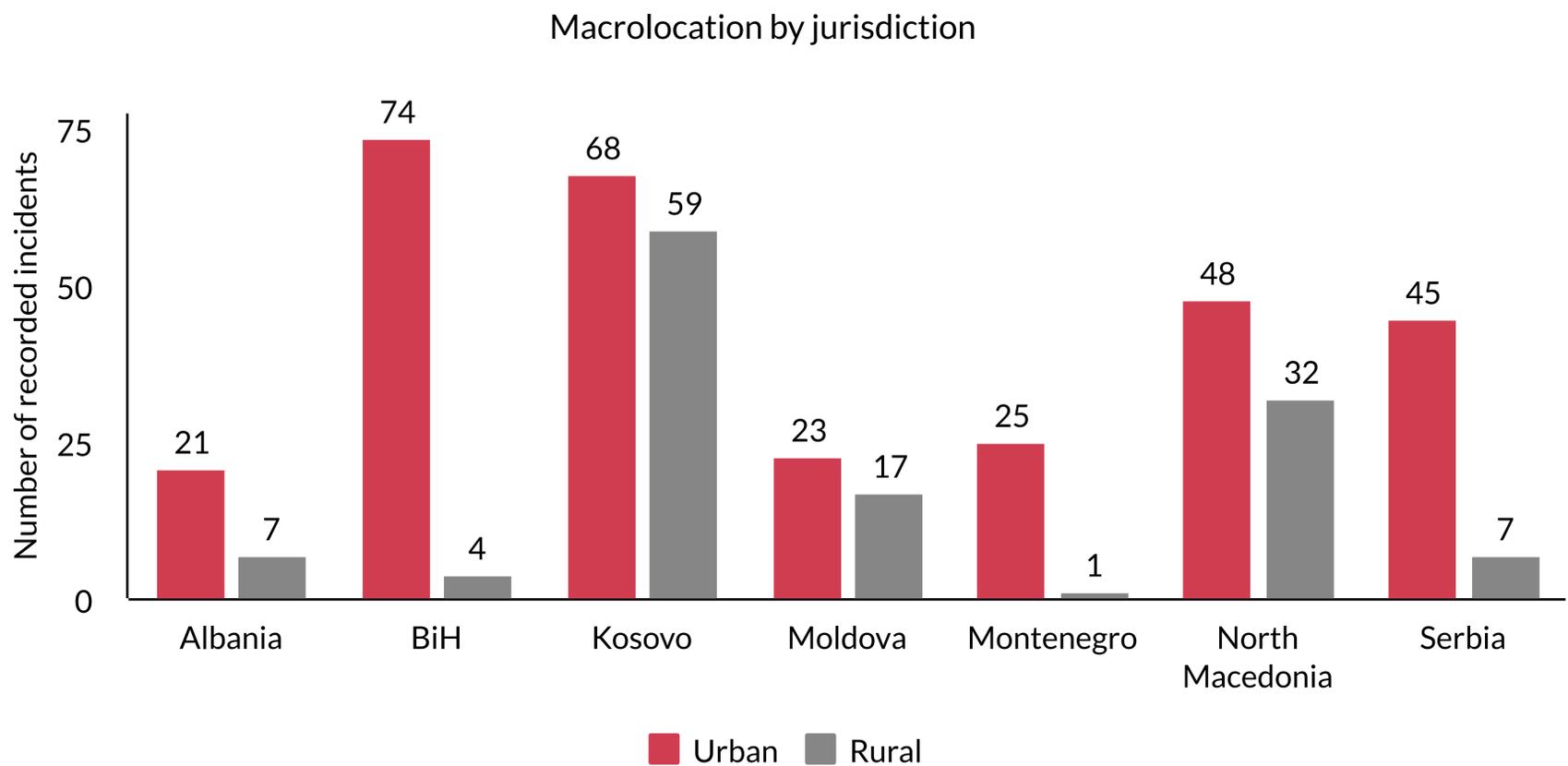
<sup>4</sup> Suicide refers to all incidents in which the victim killed him/herself with an explosive.

<sup>5</sup> Not applicable refers to all incidents in which explosives were present but not used or activated.

## 5. Macrolocation

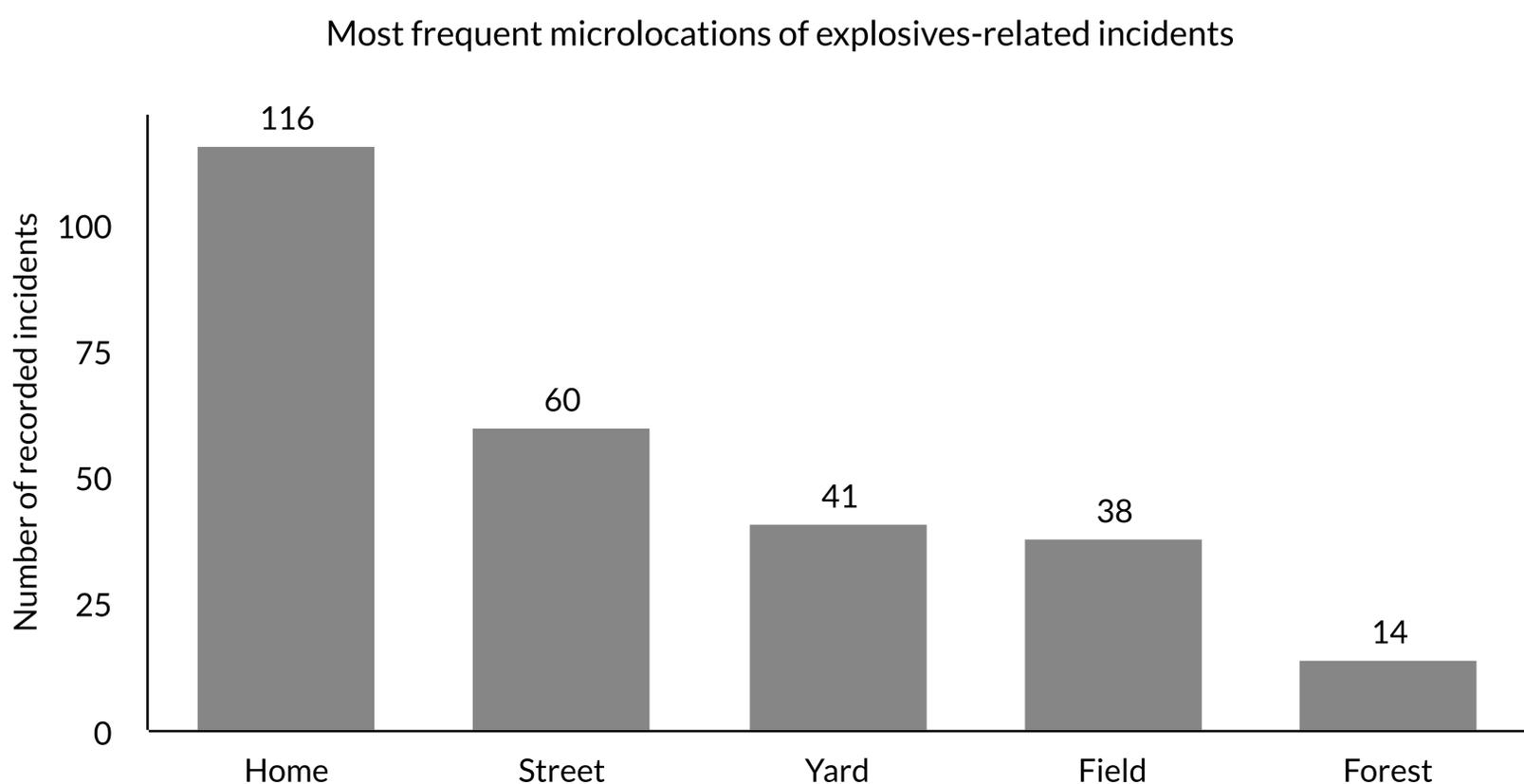
The AVMP data for 2020 show that 297 explosives-related incidents occurred in urban areas, thus accounting for 63.3% of such incidents, while 127 (29.9%) were reported in rural areas. Given the higher population density in urban regions, the use of explosives in urban environments poses a severe safety concern.

Out of seven jurisdictions, the explosives-related incidents in Kosovo, Moldova and North Macedonia were almost equally distributed between urban and rural areas, while in the other jurisdictions the incidents predominantly took place in urban areas.



## 6. Microlocation

Data on microlocation was provided for 322 (76%) incidents with explosives, while in 102 (24%) cases, the data was not specified. More than one-third of incidents took place at homes, mainly seizures of explosives (82). Outdoor areas such as streets (60), yards (41), fields (38) and forests (14) were most frequently linked to seizures of accidentally found explosives.





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