PERPETRATORS OF FIREARM 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 brings into focus perpetrators of firearm incidents in South East Europe (SEE) from 1 January to 31 December 2020. The analysis of the AVMP entries provides a significant contribution towards a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of perpetrators. By shedding light on the perpetrators' sex and age, the context of the incident, the type of weapon used, and other factors, this Monitor strives to present the data on individuals who committed firearm incidents as perpetrators, co-perpetrators, instigators, or accomplices.

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

3,566 perpetrators of firearm incidents were recorded on the AVMP in 2020.

2,646 perpetrators whose sex was known were men, accounting for 98% of all perpetrators.

721 perpetrators were in the 19-35 age group.

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

A perpetrator refers to any individual who has used a firearm/ammunition/explosive (FAE) to commit any of the types of incidents covered by the AVMP.

In terms of weapon seizures, the perpetrator refers to any individual from whom FAE was seized by law enforcement owing to illegal possession, lack of proof of ownership, voluntary surrender, or as crime scene evidence.

Considering that the misuse of firearms is strongly gendered, with men being the majority of perpetrators, the Monitor particularly focuses on men perpetrators, with a highlight on specific age groups at risk of firearm misuse.

2. **Perpetrators by sex and jurisdiction**

In 2020, the AVMP captured 3,566 perpetrators who committed 2,469 (85.5%) incidents in South East Europe. For 418 (14.5%) incidents, the number of perpetrators was not stated.

The sex was specified for 2,700 (75.7%) perpetrators, of whom 2,646 were men (98%) compared to only 54 women (2%), suggesting a highly gendered nature of firearm misuse. This pattern was evident in all jurisdictions with men being the predominant perpetrators.

For almost one-fourth of perpetrators, i.e. 866 (24.3%), the sex was not reported.

Kosovo accounted for one-third of the total number of perpetrators (1,817), nearly half of whom (45.5%) were involved in incidents related to weapon seizures. Bosnia and Herzegovina (736) and Serbia (456) follow at some distance.
3. Perpetrators by age and sex

The age was reported for 1,475 (41.4%) perpetrators showing that almost one-half of perpetrators were aged 19-35 (721, or 48.7%), followed by those aged 36 to 60 (587, or 39.7%). A total of 57 (3.9%) perpetrators under 19 years of age were reported, 110 (7.4%) perpetrators were 61 and older.

The AVMP data on perpetrators' age shows that the involvement in firearm incidents of both women and men peaks in early adulthood and declines with age.

The age was not known for 2,091 (58.6%) perpetrators, including 709 (19.8%) perpetrators whose sex was also not stated.

It should be noted that the lack of information on the perpetrators' age and sex may be due to the fact that the perpetrators remained unknown, but it may also be because the level of information provided by the media and the relevant authorities' official websites varies across jurisdictions. In particular, statements on the firearm incidents available on the relevant authorities' websites in, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro may specify the perpetrators' age but refer to them in neutral gender. In contrast, Kosovo police daily incident reports state the sex but rarely provide the perpetrators' age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-18</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-35</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-60</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-100</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>2,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>3,566</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on both age and sex was reported for 1,318 (36.9%) perpetrators, suggesting that perpetrators were mostly found among men aged 19-35, closely followed by men in the 36-60 age group. This age pattern also applies to women despite their considerably reduced involvement in committing firearm incidents.
4. Perpetrators by type of incident and sex

The highest number of perpetrators (1,316 or 36.9%) was recorded in weapon seizures, being the most reported type of incident in 2020. With 1,008 (28.2%) perpetrators, incidents in the Criminal context* were next with a notable number of perpetrators, followed by incidents in the Other** category with 513 (14.4%) perpetrators.

* 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.).

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

Regarding the perpetrators in specific subcategories of firearm incidents covered by the AVMP, more than half of the perpetrators in the criminal context were involved in armed robberies (586). Organized crime incidents and undetermined shootings follow, with a similar number of men, who make up the majority of perpetrators in all subcategories.

An almost equal number of perpetrators were involved in celebratory shootings (81) and accidental shootings (77). In the rest of the subcategories, such as other criminal incidents, explosions, non-hunting-related shooting of animals, and hunting the number of perpetrators was low.

The graph shows the subcategories in which the recorded number of perpetrators exceeded 50.
5. Men perpetrators

According to the available data on the perpetrators' sex, men were reported as perpetrators in almost 98% of all recorded firearm incidents, clearly indicating highly gendered patterns of firearm misuse.

- Men as prevalent perpetrators of all types of incidents covered by the AVMP, were most frequently involved in weapon seizures. i.e. 41% or 1,085 perpetrators, almost half of whom were reported in Kosovo.

- In the criminal context, men account for 97% of perpetrators of incidents in which the data of sex was indicated, with a nearly equal distribution of men in armed robberies and organized crime incidents. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia each reported almost a fourth of all men perpetrators in this category.

- Apart from 49 perpetrators whose sex was not specified, men were the sole perpetrators in incidents related to public disputes in all jurisdictions, with Kosovo accounting for 45% of all perpetrators in this category.

- Men make up 99% of perpetrators of domestic violence incidents, with the highest number reported in Serbia (22) and Albania (18). All cases of intimate partner violence were committed by men (39). Ten men committed suicide with a firearm after perpetrating domestic violence.

- Out of 415 men perpetrators in the Other category, 65.7% were involved in undetermined shootings, while men were the sole perpetrators in incidents related to non-hunting shooting of animals, explosions and suicides.
Men in the 19-35 age group were most likely to commit firearm incidents in 2020, comprising almost 50% of perpetrators whose age and sex was known.

Albania (155), Serbia (139) and North Macedonia (100) had the highest number of men perpetrators in this age group. The remaining perpetrators in this age range (229) were distributed almost evenly among Moldova, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- Nearly one-third (222) of all men perpetrators in this age group were involved in weapon seizures, mostly in North Macedonia (58), Serbia (50) and Albania (44). Compared to perpetrators in other age groups, men aged 19-35 had the highest involvement in incidents in the criminal context, public disputes and undetermined shootings.

- In the majority of incidents, these perpetrators acted alone (316), while in 169 incidents, they paired with other perpetrators, mainly in organized crime incidents (46 cases) and weapon seizures (42 cases).

- These perpetrators committed firearm incidents most frequently in urban areas (485 cases) at homes (148 cases) and streets (138 cases).
Men perpetrators aged 36-60

Men aged 36 to 60 constitute the second most common age group with a great propensity for firearm misuse. In 2020, men within this age range had a 38.1% share among all perpetrators whose sex and age were known.

A total of 28% (142) of all men perpetrators in this age group was recorded in Serbia, followed by Albania (90). Other jurisdictions had a relatively similar share of these perpetrators.

- Despite strong involvement in weapon seizures (199) and incidents in the criminal context, primarily organized crime incidents (71), men in this age group comprise more than half of all men perpetrators of domestic violence (45).

- Furthermore, 28 men aged 36-60 committed suicide with a firearm, seven of whom did so in the context of domestic violence in a murder-suicide pattern.

- In 349 incidents, they acted alone, mostly in weapon seizures (154 cases), public disputes (48 cases), and cases of domestic violence (45 cases).

- The men in this age range committed the highest number of firearm incidents at homes.
**Men perpetrators aged 61 and older**

A total of 104 men perpetrators aged 61 and older were reported in the region in 2020, with the highest number recorded in jurisdictions shown in the graph above. Men perpetrators in this age group were mainly involved in weapon seizures. However, they were yet another age group showing a significant propensity for suicides, with 23 men who committed suicides, two of whom in the context of domestic violence. A decline in involvement in criminal activities is evident with this age group, given that only three perpetrators aged 61 and older were reported in association with organized crime incidents and none in armed robberies.

**Men perpetrators under 19 years of age**

Out of 57 perpetrators under 19 years of age reported in 2020, 47 were men, the majority of whom were reported in Kosovo, Albania and Serbia, while in other jurisdiction their number was lower than five. The highest number of these perpetrators was reported in connection to weapon seizures (15), armed robberies (9) and accidental shootings (8). Perpetrators in this age group were not reported in incidents related to organized crime and disputes with police.
**Men perpetrators of unknown age**

The data on age was not provided for 51.5% (1,363) men perpetrators, with 73% of them reported in Kosovo mainly in connection to weapon seizures (516), public disputes (171), undetermined shootings (131) and celebratory shooting (50).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, men perpetrators whose age was unknown were almost equally involved in organized crime incidents (25), armed robberies (25) and public disputes (20).

**Men perpetrators of firearm homicides**

In 2020, a total of 149 men were involved in firearm homicides, with Albania (41), Serbia (38) and Bosnia and Herzegovina reporting the highest number of perpetrators.

The highest number of firearm homicides involving men perpetrators occurred in the context of domestic violence, where men (28) killed a family member and/or an intimate partner. The second-highest number of firearm homicides with men perpetrators (40) was reported in public disputes. Firearm homicides in criminal context follow with 36 men perpetrators and homicides committed in undermined shootings with 23 perpetrators.

When the age was known, men in the age group 36-60 were more likely to commit homicide, with men aged 19-35 following closely behind.
6. Women perpetrators

With 2%, women constituted a small portion of perpetrators, being reported in 49 incidents, while they accounted for 20% of all victims fo firearm incidents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Accidental, Celebratory shooting, Hunting</th>
<th>Criminal Context</th>
<th>Dispute with police</th>
<th>Domestic violence</th>
<th>Weapon seizure</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Kosovo (13), Bosnia and Herzegovina (11), and Albania (10) had a relatively similar number of women perpetrators, while their number was below ten in other jurisdictions.

- More than one-half of all women perpetrators (28) were reported in connection to weapon seizures, mainly in Kosovo (7) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (6). They acted alone in 17 cases, while in ten cases, they paired with men.

- Eleven incidents in criminal context involved 14 women perpetrators, seven of whom in organized crime incidents and seven in robberies. Almost all women involved in organized crime were reported in Albania (5). Women were sole perpetrators in three incidents in the criminal context, all robberies committed with a fake/toy gun, while the other eight incidents involved other individuals, 20 of whom were men.

- Five women perpetrators were reported in five undetermined shootings. One woman committed a firearm homicide in the context of domestic violence, while another acted as an accomplice in a firearm homicide.

- Low involvement of women in the context of accidental shootings, dispute with police and domestic violence was noted, while no women committed firearm incidents related to public disputes, celebratory shooting and hunting.

- When the age was known, more than one-half of women perpetrators were between 19 and 35 years old (19 women), and nearly one third were in the 36-60 age group (13 women). One woman perpetrator was younger than 19, and two were 61 and older. In most jurisdictions, women perpetrators fall under the two key age groups, except for Kosovo, where most perpetrators’ age was not reported, and Montenegro, where the only woman whose age was known was older than 61.

- Incidents with women perpetrators were reported mostly in urban areas (45 or 91.8%) most of which took place at home (22) and street (7).
7. Perpetrators of unknown sex and age

- The data on both sex and age was not provided for nearly 20% (709) of all perpetrators, more than half of whom were reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina (368), followed by Kosovo with 155 and North Macedonia with 72 perpetrators.
- The majority of these perpetrators were involved in robberies, predominantly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (165) and Kosovo (127). A notable number of these perpetrators linked with weapon seizures was reported in North Macedonia (84).
- Perpetrators from this group involved in the undetermined shooting were mostly reported in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 16 perpetrators each, as well as North Macedonia (10).
- Eleven perpetrators were involved in the non-hunting-related shooting of animals.

8. Law enforcement officers as perpetrators

Apart from 18 cases in which law enforcement officers used their service weapons to respond to open fire, in self-defence or to fire warning shots while performing their duties, they were also reported as perpetrators of other firearm incidents.

In particular, 13 law enforcement officers caused accidental shooting incidents due to improper handling of their service weapons, with seven incidents resulting in self-injuries and one death. Seven law enforcement officers committed suicides with firearms, five of whom used weapons in legal possession. Two law enforcement officers (one man and one woman) were perpetrators in cases of domestic violence.
9. Outcome for perpetrators

- Perpetrators were caught in 1,887 out of 2,887 firearm incidents recorded in 2020.
- Despite being known, perpetrators (138) were not caught in 111 cases, primarily in public disputes, weapon seizures and undetermined shootings, mainly involving men of unknown age (59) or individuals whose sex and age were not reported (29).
- Men of unknown age (136) and individuals whose sex and age were not stated (457) comprise the majority of perpetrators who remained unknown in 781 incidents. When the exact number of perpetrators was known, perpetrators were mostly reported unknown in armed robberies (459) and undetermined shootings (74).
- Thirty-two people (mostly men) sustained self-inflicting gunshot wounds in accidental shootings and three men in attempted suicides. Sixty-seven persons committed suicide, 11 of whom (ten men and one woman) in the context of domestic violence and two men in public disputes.

10. Presence of drugs and alcohol

The presence of drugs and alcohol in firearm incidents is not uncommon. A total of 419 (11.7%) perpetrators were linked to incidents involving the presence of drugs, with the highest number of perpetrators reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina (126), Serbia (80), Albania (65) and Moldova (62). Among incidents in which the data on sex and age was available, 276 were men and 10 were women most frequently aged 19-35 (124) or 36-60 (88). Almost all cases involving the presence of drugs were linked to weapon seizures and organized crime incidents.

The presence of alcohol was reported in connection to 81 men in 70 firearm incidents, mainly related to public disputes, weapon seizures, undetermined shootings and domestic violence. When the age was known, most men were aged 36-60 (19) or 19-35 (13).
11. Perpetrators and type of weapon

- The type of weapon was reported in connection to 3,043 (85.3%) perpetrators, with men outnumbering women by a large margin.

- Among 37.4% of perpetrators (1,333) handguns dominated as the weapon of choice particularly in relation to weapon seizures (461), robberies (309), undetermined shootings (94) and domestic violence (37). When the age was known, handguns were mainly used by men aged 19-36 (243). Almost half of women perpetrators (21) also used handguns.

- Rifles/shotguns as the second most employed type of weapon were reported in connection to 368 perpetrators, 86.9% of whom were men. When the age was stated, this type of weapon was chosen mainly by men aged 36-60 (66), with men aged 19-35 (52) closely behind. Perpetrators used rifles/shotguns in weapon seizures (215), public disputes (34), and undetermined shootings (23).

- Perpetrators who used automatic/military-grade weapons (258) were mostly men of unspecified age (117) and those in the 19-35 age group (50). Seven women were reported to have used automatic weapons in 2020.

- A total of 133 perpetrators, primarily men, were reported linked to the use of explosives. The perpetrators mainly used explosives to set off explosions (32), while ten men committed suicide using explosives.

- Gas pistols were used by 133 persons, of whom 119 were men. This type of weapon was used by 55 perpetrators in connection to weapon seizures, 23 in undetermined shootings and 16 in celebratory shootings.

- Men (7) under 19 and women (5) showed a tendency towards the use of fake/toy guns, mainly in robberies, which may suggest their access and attitude to firearms.

- Multiple types of SALW were reported in connection to 459 perpetrators, of whom 331 were men and 8 were women, mainly involved in weapon seizures (259) and organized crime incidents (101).
12. Perpetrators and the legal status of weapon possession

In 2020, perpetrators were associated with weapons in illegal possession almost ten times more frequently than legally held weapons, specifically in 1,252 (43.4%) incidents, whereas legal weapons were reported in 133 (4.6%) incidents. The legal status of weapon possession was not indicated in more than half of the incidents, i.e. 1,502 (52%).

A total of 138 perpetrators were reported in connection to legally owned weapons, with men as predominant perpetrators (123) compared to 8 women, while sex was not indicated for 11 perpetrators.

Legally owned weapons were used for committing 11 suicides, 20 accidental shootings, and in 8 undetermined shootings. In 21 cases, unidentified perpetrators stole legally owned weapons.

Nearly 50% (1,755) of perpetrators were linked to weapons in illegal possession. Men (1,425) were more likely than women (32) to use weapons in illegal possession. Perpetrators used those weapons most commonly in weapon seizures (1,005 cases) and robberies (339 cases) and undetermined shootings (258 cases).
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This Project was funded by the European Union