



IN FOCUS

Armed Violence Monitor

Issue No. 11

FIREARM-RELATED SUICIDES

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 draws attention to **firearm-related suicides** in South East Europe (SEE) in **2021**, including a comparative overview of 2020. Suicide is a severe and complex global issue affecting people of all ages, nations, cultures, communities, and genders. Methods of suicide vary; however, there is a strong possibility that suicide attempts involving firearms and explosives will be lethal.

The term firearm-related suicide is used in this report to describe acts or instances in which people voluntarily and intentionally ended their lives using firearms, ammunition, and explosives (FAE). Thus, the report addresses firearm-related suicides with fatal outcomes, resulting from acts involving the suicide victim only as well as from murder-suicides.¹

The report also makes a brief mention of attempted suicides, i.e. acts in which an individual survives the attempt to die by suicide. It needs to be noted that the overall number of firearm-related suicides in 2021 indicated in the report includes both the cases involving suicide victims only and murder suicides but excludes attempted suicides.

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

45

firearm-related suicides were reported in 2021, 34% less than in 2020.

17

men murdered one or more other persons before dying by suicide.

15

cases involving **handguns** were reported, making them the **most commonly used weapon**.

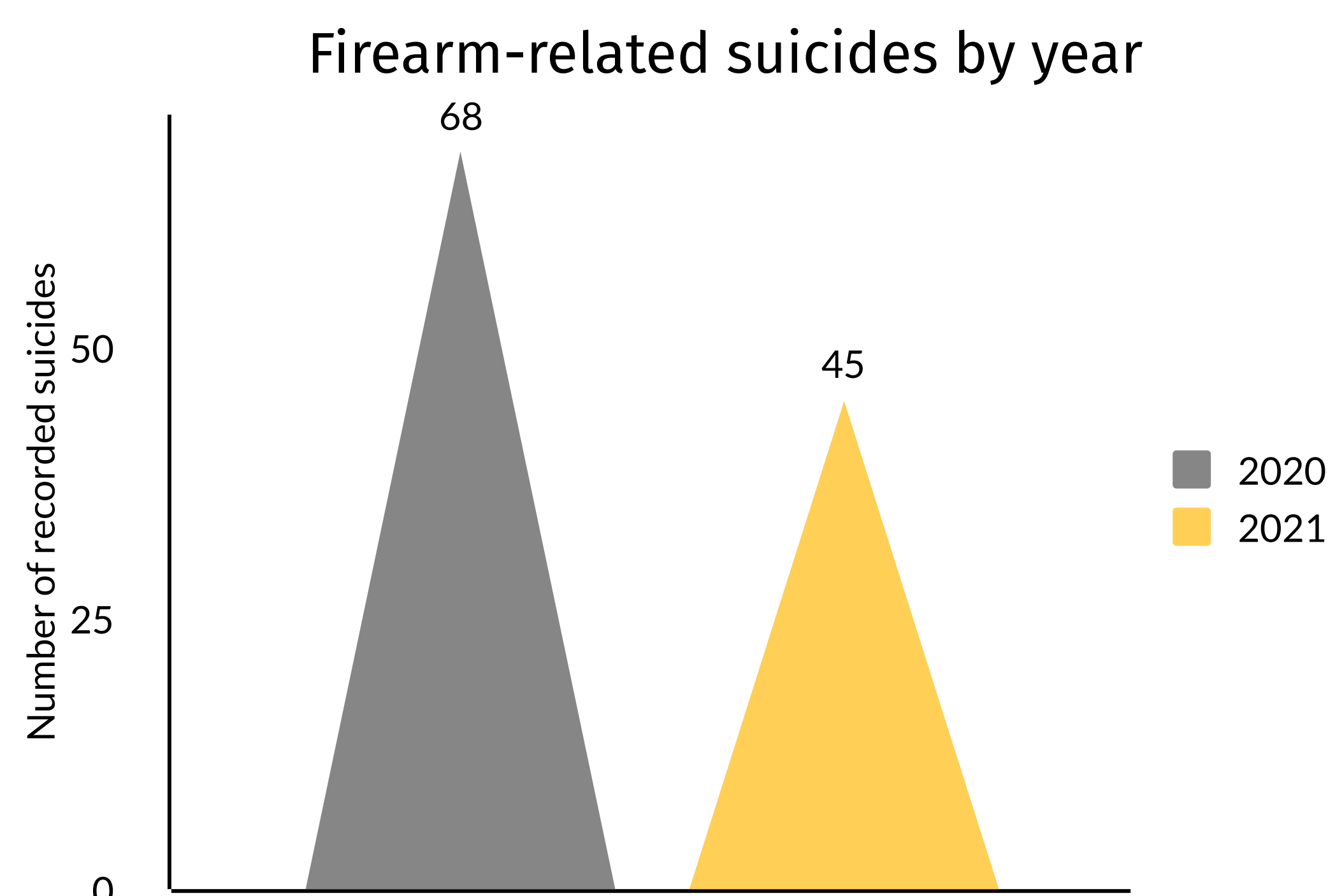
* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹ The term murder suicides refers to acts in which an individual kills one or more people before taking their own life.

1. General overview

Suicide is a severe phenomenon responsible for a significant number of deaths worldwide. Even though firearms and explosives are not the most common means that people use in suicides, they are highly lethal.

According to the AVMP data for 2021, 45 firearm-related suicides were reported, accounting for one-fourth of all firearm deaths recorded in the mentioned year. In comparison to 2020, the number of reported firearm-related suicides dropped by 34% in 2021.

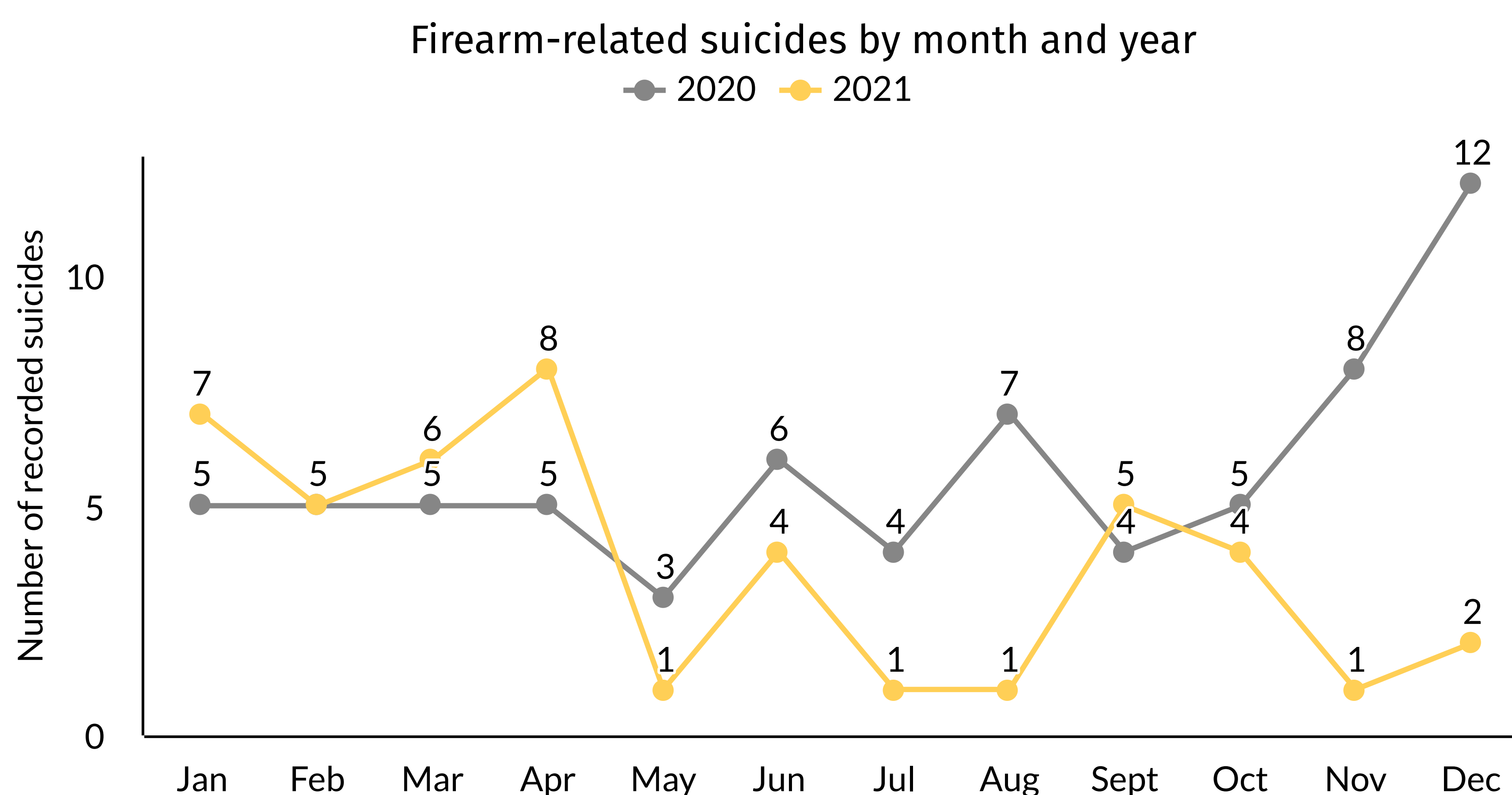


It needs to be noted though that these figures are significantly lower compared to the data provided in the Roadmap Key Performance Indicators (KPI) reports² covering [2020](#) and [2021](#) provided by the Western Balkans authorities.³ According to the KPI progress reports, 213 suicides with firearms were reported in 2021, a 13% rise from 2020 (189). The AVMP's comparison figures, on the other hand, show a drop in the number of suicides.

The reduced number of firearm-related suicides that the AVMP captured using publicly available reports could be attributed to the sensitive nature of the issue and the stigma attached to it. Accurate suicide statistics are further complicated by the frequent misclassification⁴ of suicides.

2. Firearm-related suicides by month

The number of reported firearm-related suicides fluctuated throughout the year, averaging four cases per month. In contrast to 2020, when the peak was observed at the end of the year, the highest number of cases was reported during the early months of the year, i.e. January (7) and April (8).



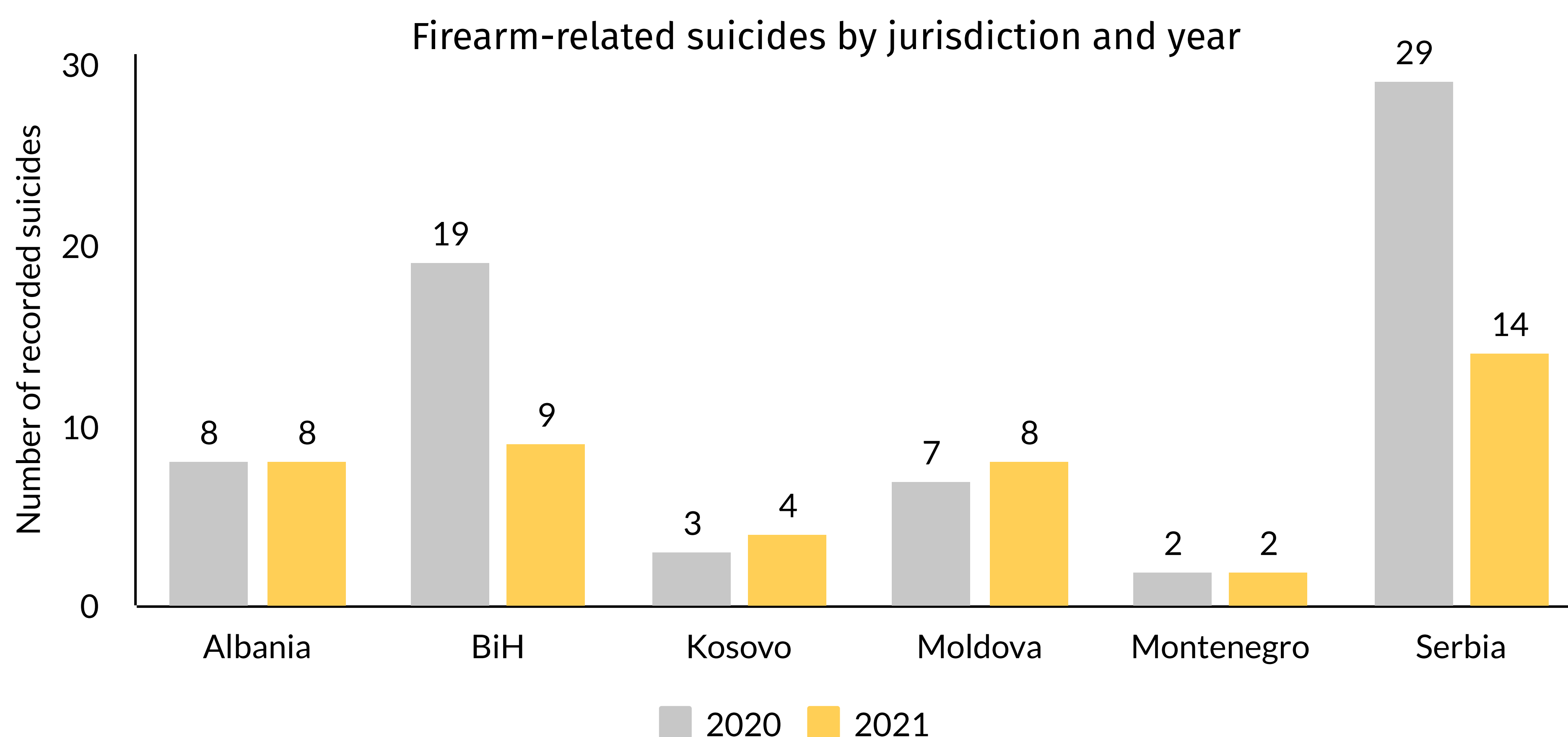
² Key Performance Indicators (KPI) serve to measure progress in the implementation of the [Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons \(SALW\) and their ammunition in the western Balkans by 2024](#). The Roadmap covers six jurisdictions of the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

³ The KPI reports cover the Western Balkans jurisdictions while the AVMP also includes data on the Republic of Moldova.

⁴ Suicides are sometimes found among deaths classified as "undetermined" or "accidental".

3. Firearm-related suicides by jurisdiction

The In 2021, Serbia (14) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (9), reported the highest number of firearm-related suicides, following the same pattern observed in 2020. However, it must be noted that in both jurisdictions the reported numbers more than halved in 2021. Other jurisdictions documented a comparable or identical number of cases as in 2020, with Kosovo and Moldova recording a slight increase. No firearm-related suicide cases were reported in North Macedonia for the third year in a row.



4. Victims of firearm-related suicides by age and sex

Over the years, it was observed that the disparity between male and female suicide victims was considerably higher among men in all jurisdictions, with men accounting for all or the majority of suicide victims. The same pattern prevailed in 2021, showing that men were far more likely than women to die by firearm-related suicide, with 44 men (98%) compared to one woman (2%).

In 2021, the age was reported for 40 (89%) suicide victims. The suicide rates were highest among men aged 36-60, who comprised 57% of all suicide victims whose sex and age were known. In contrast to 2020, when suicide victims who were 61 and older made up one-third of all victims, this age group had fewer victims in 2021, making up 20% of all victims.

Seven (18%) suicide victims were in the 19-35 age range, including the only woman victim. One suicide victim was aged 18. The age was not known for six men.

Age	Sex		Total
	Men	Woman	
0-18	1		
19-35	6	1	7
36-60	23		23
61+	8		
Unknown	6		6
Total	44	1	45

5. Main characteristics of firearm-related suicides

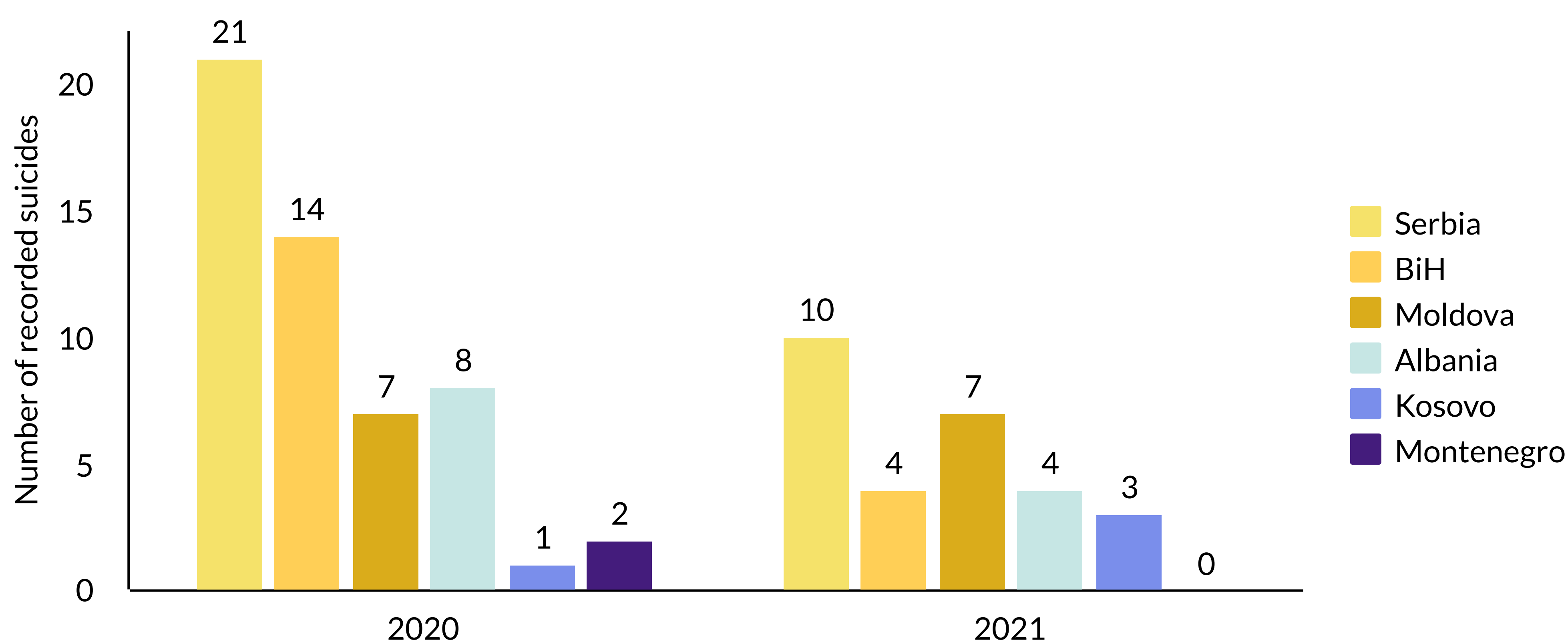
5.1 Attempted suicides

Even though the report focuses primarily on firearm-related suicides with fatal outcomes, it should be noted that according to the AVMP data, five people, all men, attempted to kill themselves with firearms in 2021, which is slightly less than in 2020 when six such cases were reported. Three men were older than 61. In two cases, men attempted to kill themselves after they had killed other family members following a dispute. Nearly all of these cases (4) took place in urban areas.

5.2 Firearm-related suicides involving suicide victims only

Firearm-related suicides involving suicide victims only refer to instances in which individuals used firearms or explosives to end their life without involving other victims. As per AVMP data, 28 such cases were reported in 2021, almost half the number reported in 2020 (52).

Firearm-related suicides not involving other victims by jurisdiction and year



- Suicide victims in these cases were 27 men and one woman. The highest propensity towards suicide was seen among men aged 36-60 (24 or 54%). There was a threefold decrease in the number of victims who were 61 and older in 2021 (6 or 25%) compared to 2020 (19). Among those aged 19-35 were three men and one woman (17%), while one male victim was 18. The age of four men (4%) was unknown.
- In comparison to 2020, there was a notable decrease in the number of such cases in Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania. Moldova reported the same number as in 2020, while in Kosovo there was a slight increase. No such cases were reported in Montenegro in 2021.
- When the type of weapon was indicated, handguns were the main weapon of choice in both years, even though their use halved in 2021. More specifically, nine men and one woman died by suicide using handguns. Most of these victims were men in the 36-60 age range. As in 2020, Serbia reported the highest number of persons who killed themselves with handguns (6). In two cases, the handguns were in legal possession. Six men, mostly aged 36-60, died by suicide using rifles/shotguns, one of which was in legal possession. Rifles/shotguns were mainly used in rural areas. Explosives were used in three cases, in contrast to 2020, when their use was more frequent.
- Among victims were also three law enforcement officers who killed themselves with firearms, of whom one used his service weapon.
- These cases more commonly took place in urban (17) than in rural areas (11). In both rural and urban areas, homes (14 or 61%) were the most reported setting. Three men ended their life with firearms in the street. One law enforcement officer died by suicide at his workplace and one man at a shooting range.
- Due to a lack of information, the motives for suicides remained unknown in almost all cases. In two cases, mental health issues were cited by men aged 35-60. One man, older than 61, died by suicide due to poor health.

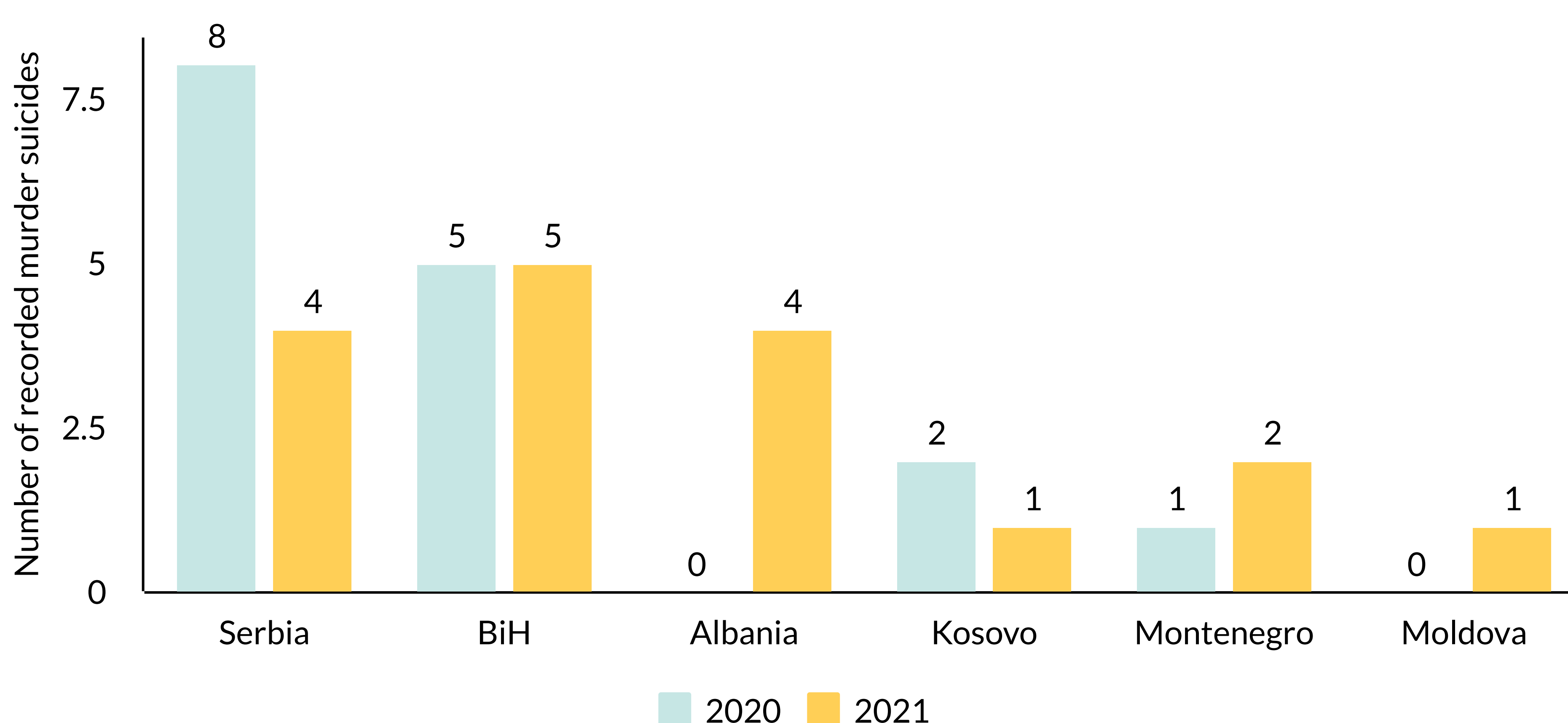
5.3 Murder suicides

Cases in the murder suicide pattern, in which a person kills one or more people before killing themselves, were also documented in 2021. Due to their distressing nature, firearm-related suicides occurring in murder suicides receive more media coverage and attention. As a result, the relevant authorities and media provide a greater amount and quality of information, offering a broader context, suggesting that these incidents most commonly happen in the context of domestic violence.

5.3.1 Murder suicides in jurisdictions

An almost identical number of murder suicides was reported in both years, with a 6% rise in 2021. Bosnia and Herzegovina (5) recorded the same number in both years. A shift in the trend was seen in Albania (4) and Moldova (1), where such incidents were not recorded in 2020. A slight increase was observed in Montenegro (2), while Serbia recorded a two-fold drop.

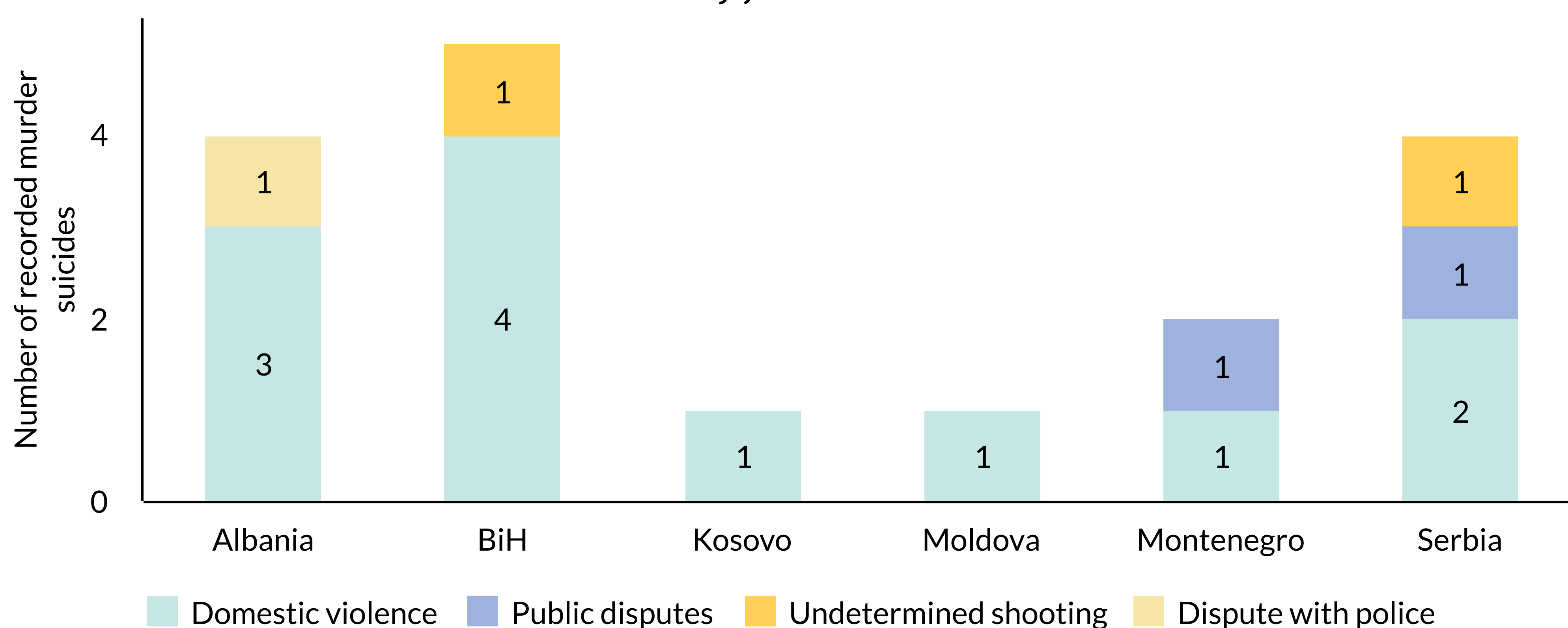
Murder suicides by jurisdiction and year



Seventeen murder suicides that occurred in 2021, resulted in 19 dead, five injured and one threatened victim, apart from 17 suicide victims. Perpetrators in murder suicides were all men, mainly aged 35-60.

Similar to 2020, most of these tragic events took place in the domestic violence context, involving family members and intimate partners as victims. Less commonly, such incidents also occurred in the context of public disputes among friends and acquaintances. In contrast to 2020, murder suicides also happened in the context of undetermined shootings and dispute with police.

Murder suicides by jurisdiction and context



5.3.2 Context of murder suicides

Domestic violence context

Out of 17 murder suicides reported in 2021, twelve (71%) occurred in the context of domestic violence, of which nine were in the context of intimate partner violence and three in incidents involving other family members. There were more murder suicides involving intimate partners in 2021 than in 2020, while fewer of those involving other family members.

Murder suicides involving intimate partners

- Men committed all nine murder suicides in the context of intimate partner violence. The majority of perpetrators were aged 35-60 (6).
- Prior to suicide, the men killed (8) or injured (1) their intimate female partners.
- In three cases, apart from killing their female intimate partners, the perpetrators also killed two women and one man, injured one man and threatened another man, who were present during the incident.
- When the type of weapon was indicated, the men used rifle/shotguns (3 cases), handguns (2 cases) and automatic/military-grade weapons mainly of an unknown type of possession. In one case rifle/shotgun was in legal possession.
- The majority of murder suicides involving intimate partners took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina (4 cases).
- Nearly all incidents took place in urban areas (7), mainly at homes (6).

Murder suicides involving other family members

- Three murder suicides involved family members, with three men perpetrators. Before suicides, the perpetrators killed three male members of their nuclear (1 case) or extended family (2 cases).
- Two incidents were committed with rifles/shotguns.
- Almost all cases took place in urban areas, with homes as the most dangerous place.
- The motives behind the incidents were mainly unknown, while property-related issues were cited in one case.

Public dispute context

- In two murder suicide cases, reported in Serbia and Montenegro, two men died by suicide after killing one and injuring another man following a dispute.

Undetermined shootings

- Two cases of undetermined shooting resulted in the suicide of two men who had previously killed two women and one man under undetermined circumstances. Both cases were committed with handguns in urban areas. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia each recorded one such case.

Dispute with police

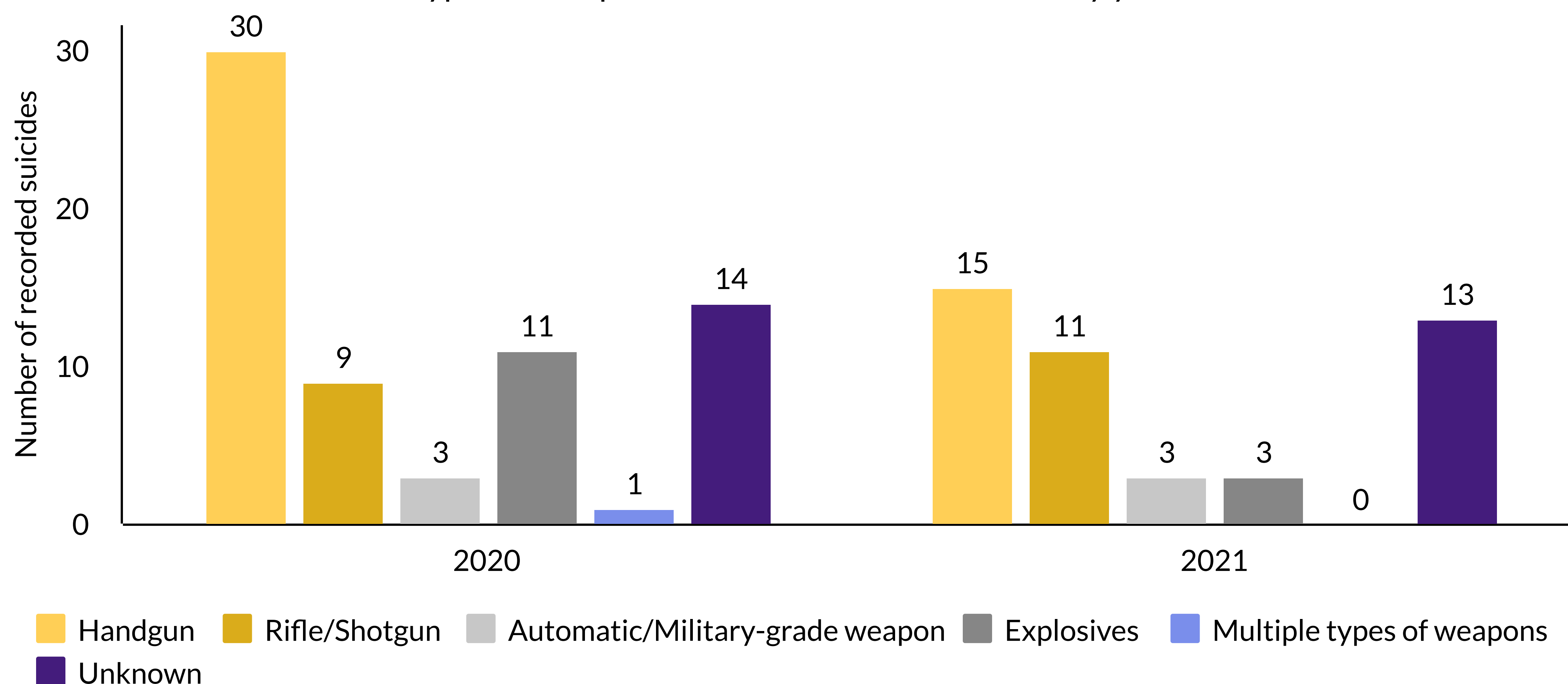
- In one case of dispute with police reported in Montenegro, a man killed a police officer and later died by suicide.

6. Type of weapon

As a result of their lethality, firearms and explosives used in suicide often have irreversible consequences.

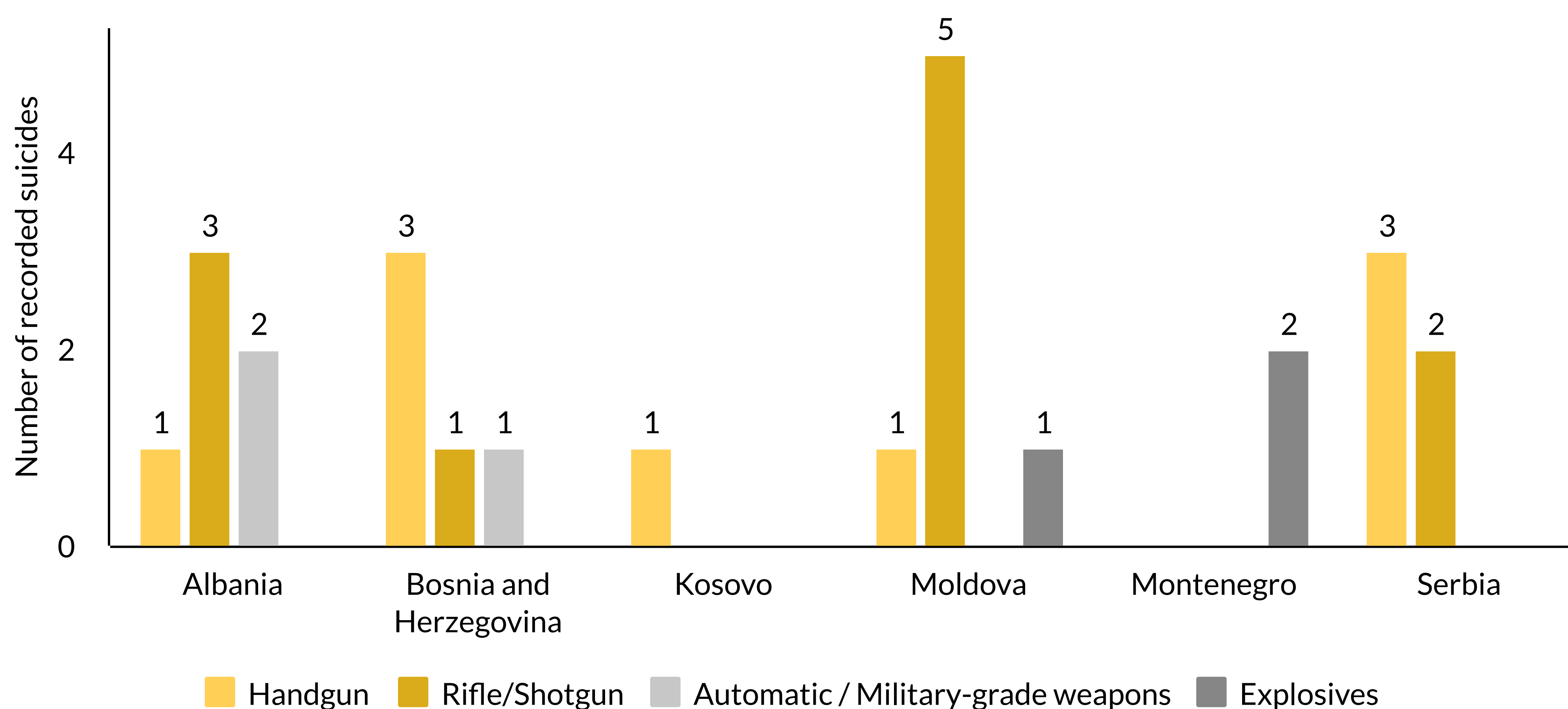
According to the AVMP data for 2021, the type of weapon used was reported in 32 (71%) suicides, whereas in 13 (29%), the weapon was unknown. The overall decrease in the number of firearm-related suicides in 2021 was reflected in the decreased use of certain types of firearms compared to 2020. The most prominent decline was observed in the use of explosives, which dropped nearly four times. Handguns were the most commonly reported weapon type in both years, but their use halved in 2021. The use of rifles, however, saw a slight increase.

Types of weapons in firearm-related suicides by year



In 2021, in nearly half of the cases when the type of weapon was known, handguns (15 cases) were the main weapon of choice in almost all jurisdictions except Moldova and Albania. Handguns were primarily reported in Serbia (9 cases). Handguns were mostly used by those aged 36-60 (8 men). Rifles/shotguns were the second most used weapon for suicides, being reported in 11 suicides, mostly in Moldova (5 cases) and Albania (3). In two cases, rifles/shotguns were in legal possession, both reported in Moldova. Rifles/shotguns were mainly used by men aged 36-60. This type of weapon was more used in rural (6 cases) than in urban areas (5 cases). Automatic/military-grade weapons and explosives were reported in three cases each.

Types of weapons in firearm-related suicides by jurisdiction



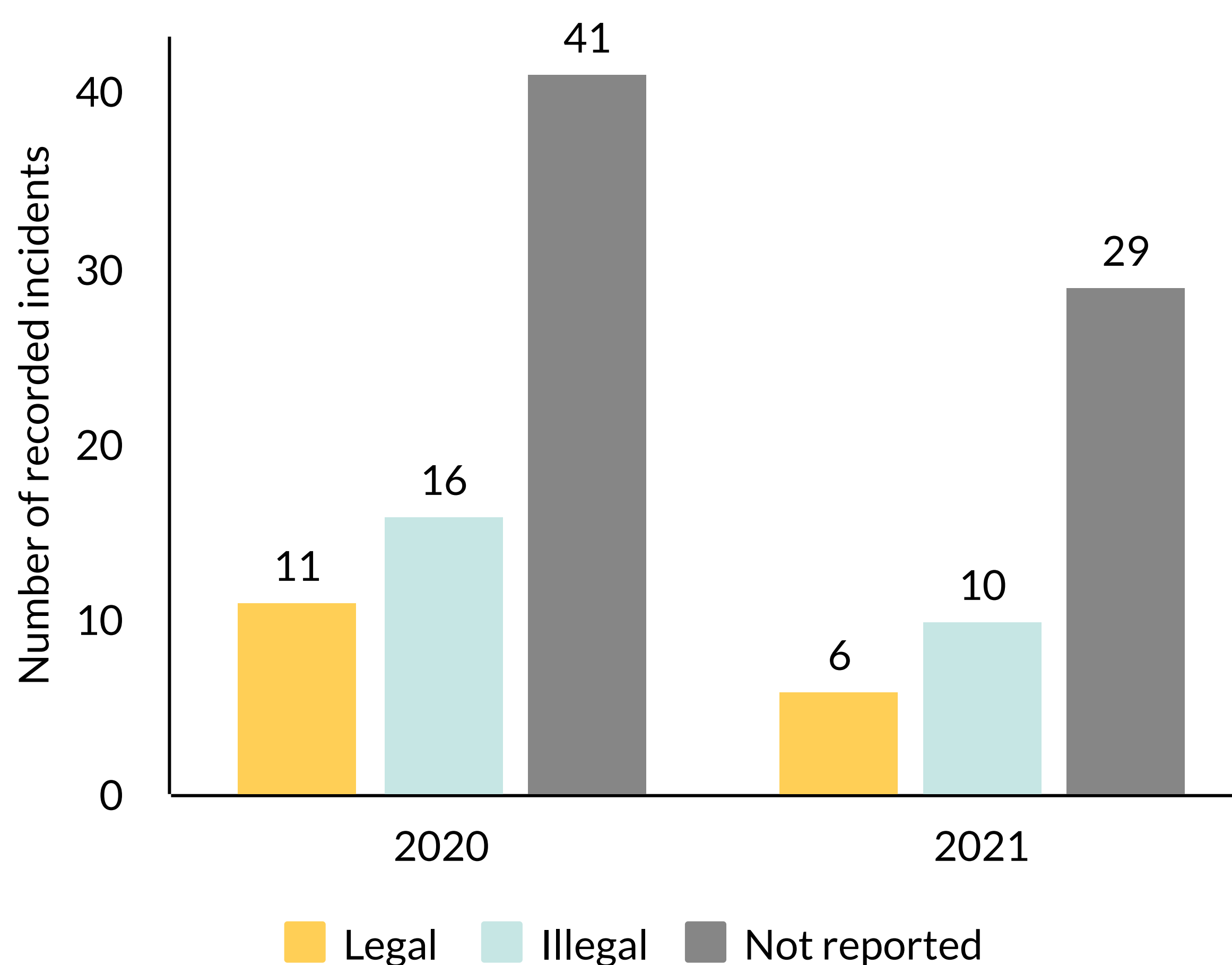
7. Legal status of weapons

In 2021, the legal status of weapons was reported in 16 cases (36%), whereas in 29 (64%) firearm-related suicides it was not specified. In cases when the legal status was specified, weapons were in legal possession in six (38%) cases, while in ten (62%) they were reported to be in illegal possession. A similar pattern also observed in 2020.

Following the prevailing trend from 2020, weapons in legal possession in 2021 were mainly handguns (2 cases) and rifles/shotguns (2 cases). Among weapons in illegal possession were mostly automatic/military-grade weapons, rifles/shotguns and explosives, with three reported cases for each type of weapon.

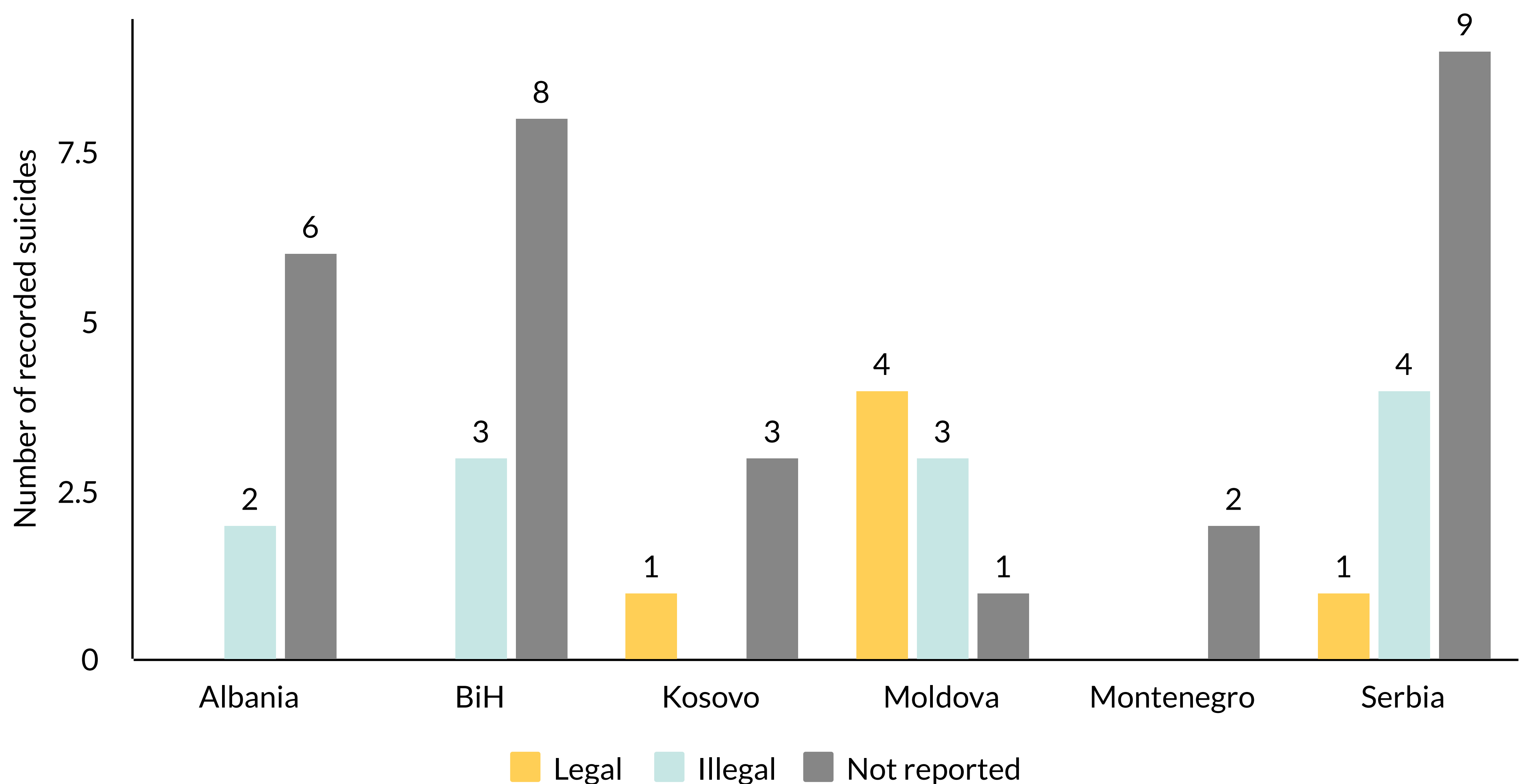
According to the reports, the law enforcement agencies seized the weapons used in eight cases (18 %) when responding to firearm-related suicide.

Legal status of weapon possession in firearm-related suicides by year



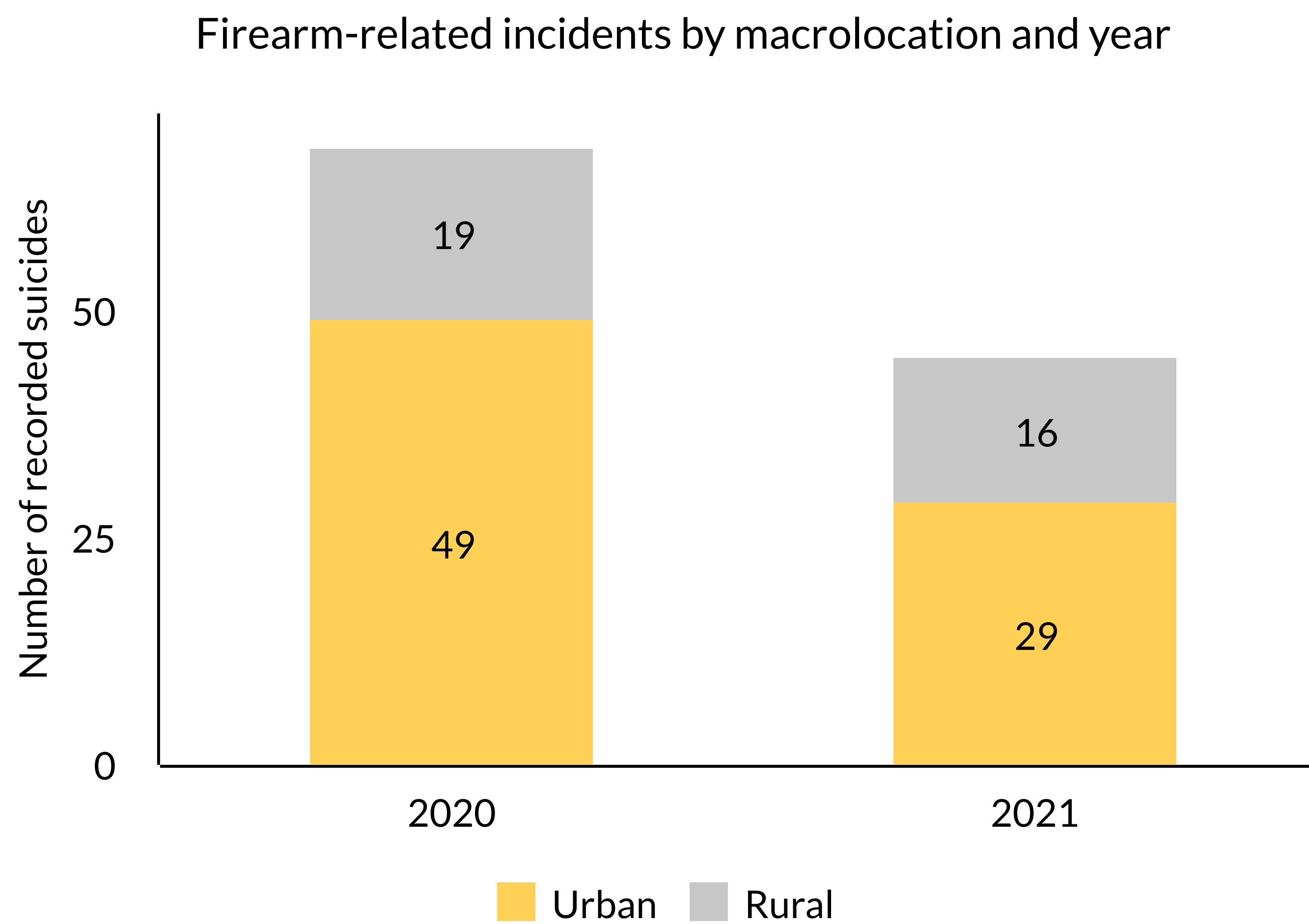
The 2021 AVMP statistics suggest that weapons in legal possession were most reported in Moldova (4 cases), of which two were rifles/shotguns. Weapons in illegal possession such as automatic/military-grade weapons were reported in Albania (2 cases) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1 case). Explosives were reported in Serbia (2 cases) and Moldova (one case).

Legal status of weapon possession in firearm-related suicides by jurisdiction

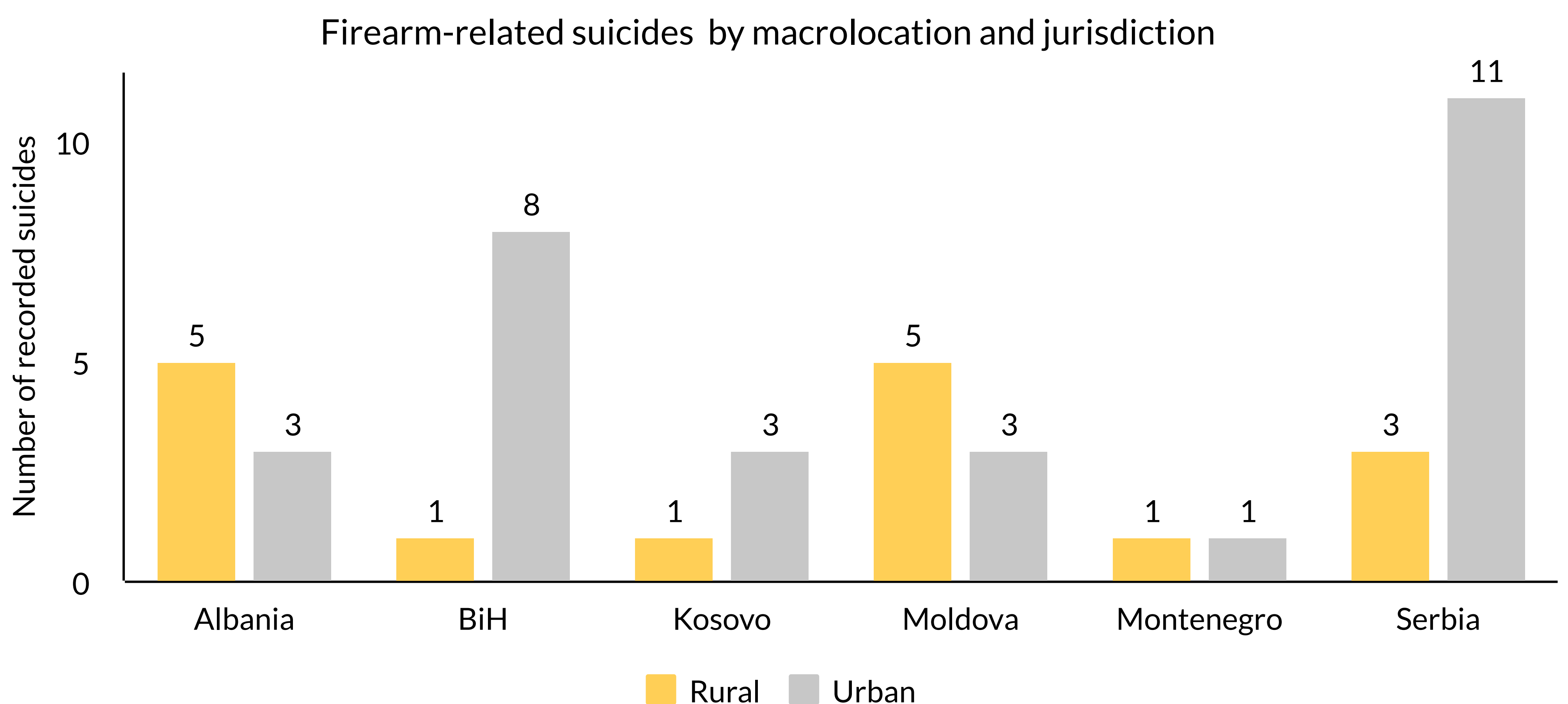


8. Macrolocation

The prevalent trend regarding macrolocation from 2020 persisted in 2021, indicating that firearm-related suicides were almost twice more frequent in urban than in rural areas. However, in 2021 the discrepancy between firearm-related suicides in urban and rural areas shrank.



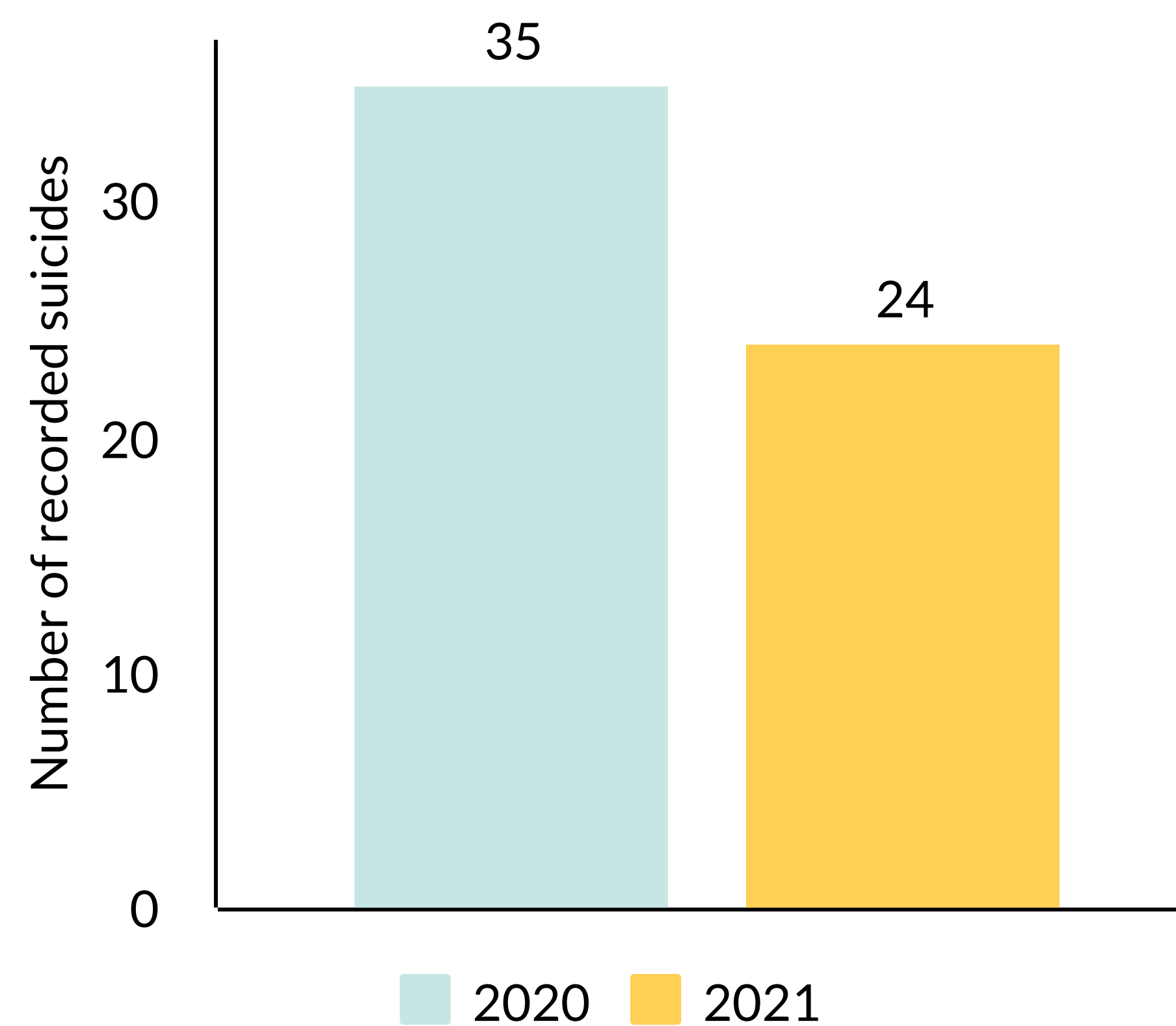
Although firearm-related suicides in urban areas outnumbered those in rural areas, Albania and Moldova reported an opposite pattern, with more suicides occurring in rural settings. The greater disparity between urban and rural cases was noticed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.



9. Microlocation

The data on microlocation indicates that in 2021, homes/yards (24 or 63%) remained the most common environment in the majority of firearm-related suicides in both rural and urban areas, continuing the pattern from 2020.

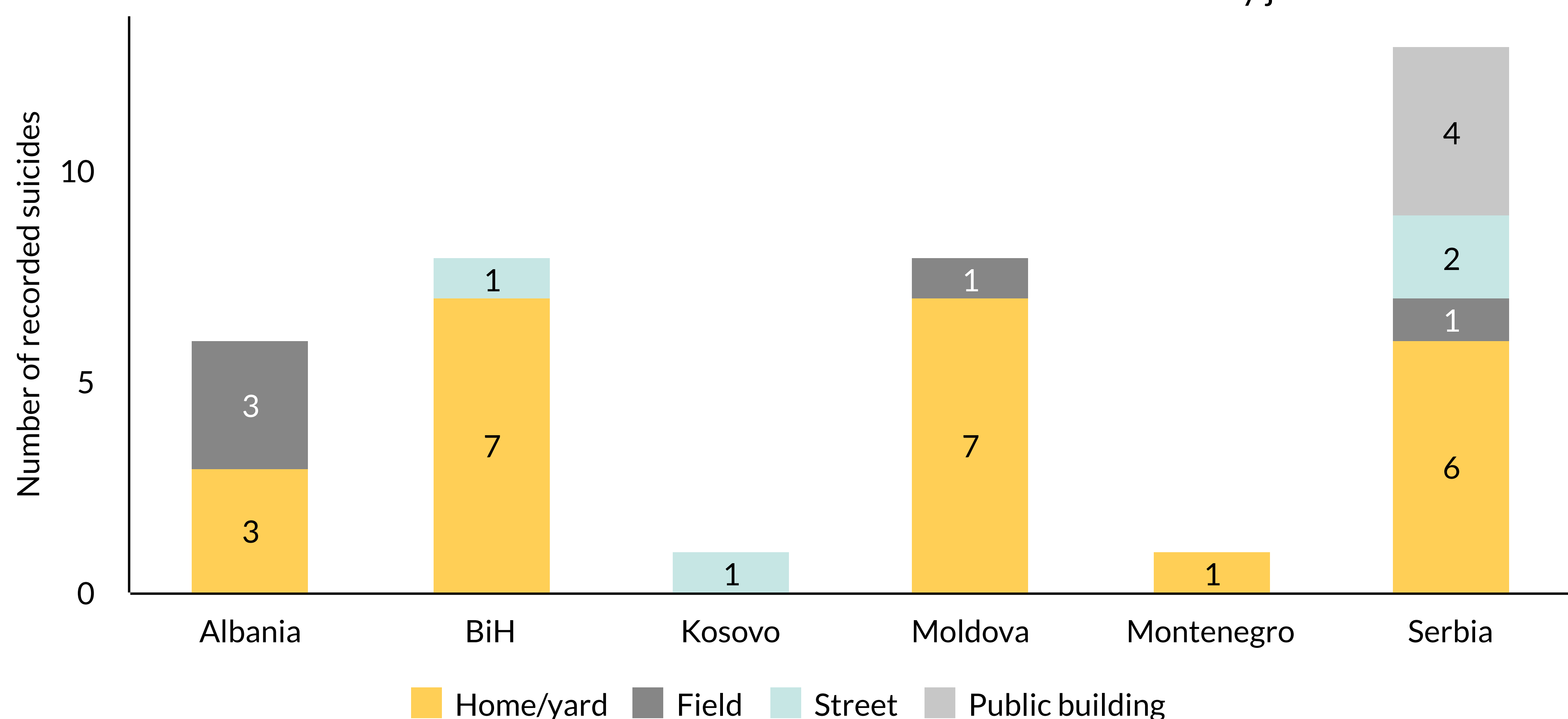
Home/Yard as the most reported microlocation in firearm-related suicides by year



In 2021, homes/yards remained the most cited setting where firearm-related suicides took place, with the exception of Kosovo where the microlocation was not indicated for the majority of cases. Four men died by suicide on the street and five in the fields. In four cases, all reported in Serbia, firearm-related suicides took place in public buildings, including military barracks and a shooting range.

For seven (16 %) suicides, no information on microlocation was reported.

Three most common microlocations in firearm-related suicides by jurisdiction





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