WESTERN BALKAN

PAR MONITOR

2019/2020

WeBER 2.0

Western Balkan Civil Society
Empowerment for a
Reformed Public Administration

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FOREWORD
BY GREGOR VIRANT

For the second time already, the team of the WeBER initiative have invited me to prepare a foreword for the Western Balkan PAR Monitor. And for the second time, I gladly accepted this invitation. My continued support for this important regional civil society initiative comes from the realisation that PAR reforms in the Western Balkans need to be driven and owned by those who live there and are directly impacted by both the good and bad practices of these administrations. In my new role as the Head of SIGMA, in which I write this text, I have become even more aware that us, EU experts, as well as EU officials, can only support and stimulate genuine reforms to an extent. Surely, our knowledge and experience from more mature democratic systems is a help in guiding the region's authorities towards building more accountable, more open, and more efficient administrations. But the resilience in such newly built institutions and practices can only come about if there is sustained pressure from civil society – pressure that well outlives the EU accession process and its inherent external conditionalities.

Achieving membership in the EU should not be a box-ticking exercise, but a process that entails deep transformation of the entire system of government and even society at large. The ultimate benefits for citizens – better qualities of life, better living standards, and better protection of basic rights – can only come about through such substantive transformation. With an engaged civil society capable of monitoring the work of government and administrations, there is a good chance that such change can be realised.

This applies to public administration reform as well. Good public administration does not emerge overnight, and we cannot expect miracles from governments. Building good public administration is a journey. But if we want to achieve significant improvements tomorrow, we must define directions and stay focused today. The experience in all the countries shows that there is nothing more important for successful public administration reform than political commitment and will, and pressure from citizens is a very powerful lever for making politicians focus on the issue.

For these reasons, I am delighted that the WeBER2.0 project has continued the good work of its predecessor project, and that the second Western Balkan PAR Monitor is now being published. As one of the external reviewers of the report, I can confidently say that this is a product based on solid evidence and quality analysis, offering valuable, complementary findings to the PAR assessments performed by SIGMA/OECD. In this sense, WeBER2.0's Western Balkan PAR Monitor is a valuable contribution to better understanding the state of play and developments in the region's public administrations. At SIGMA we particularly appreciate this work because it builds on the Principles of Public Administration and effectively complements SIGMA's monitoring work without overlaps or duplications. Insight from civil society sheds new light on the state of regional public administrations and I can only hope that these findings will be considered by the region's governments and will inform their policy decisions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT
WeBER2.0

The Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a Reformed Public Administration (WeBER2.0) is a three-year project principally funded by the European Union (EU). For activities related to the preparation and printing of the PAR Monitor 2019/2020 and the organisation of the second regional "Citizens First" conference in February 2021, co-funding was provided by the "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub" project, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and implemented by the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN). WeBER2.0 represents a continuation of the Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER), a project implemented from 2015 to 2018 and funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Kingdom of Netherlands.

The first WeBER project has contributed to increasing the relevance, participation, and capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) and the media in the Western Balkans (WB) to advocate for and influence the design and implementation of public administration reform (PAR). WeBER2.0 builds upon the previous WeBER's accomplishments and further enhances the engagement of CSOs in PAR by conducting evidence-based monitoring of PAR in line with EU requirements. It also aims to promote dialogue between CSOs and government at the regional, national, and local levels, strengthening participatory democracy and exerting pressure on governments to continue to implement administrative reforms and bring administrations closer to citizens.

A combination of activities is conducted in WeBER2.0, contributing to the achievement of the project's objective, namely:

- Through the Regional WeBER Platform and its National PAR Working Groups, which gather more than 130 CSOs, WeBER2.0 is facilitating dialogue on PAR for creating and implementing inclusive and transparent policy, as well as contributing to the sustainability of administrative reforms to the benefit of the citizens.
- Through its research and monitoring work and production of PAR Monitor reports, WeBER2.0 has created and gathered evidence for a meaningful dialogue.
- Through the CSO PAR Knowledge Centre, WeBER2.0 provides a searchable database of analyses and reports on PAR produced by the region's civil society.
- Through the "Mind (y)our reform!" online regional citizens' campaign and platform for collecting and sharing citizens' views on PAR and their experience with administrations (https://citizens.par-monitor.org/), WeBER2.0 is collecting citizens' input to influence authorities, thus contributing to the creation of more citizen-oriented public administrations.
- By piloting the monitoring approach to the mainstreaming of PAR in sectoral policies and equipping CSOs with the capacities to do it, WeBER2.0 aims to improve the embeddedness of PAR across the region's administrative systems, thus increasing the sustainability of these reforms.
- Through a small grants scheme, WeBER2.0 works on improving the capacity of CSOs in the Western Balkans to participate in PAR.

WeBER2.0 products and further information about them are available on the project's website, at www.par-monitor.org.

WeBER2.0 is implemented by the Think for Europe Network (TEN), composed of six EU policy-oriented think tanks in the Western Balkans:

By partnering with the European Policy Centre (EPC) from Brussels, WeBER2.0 has ensured EU-level visibility.

WHO DO WE COOPERATE WITH?

Under the previous WeBER project, cooperation with a multitude of stakeholders in the region and beyond has been established in the effort to ensure a sustainable course of administrative reforms in the WB. This cooperation has continued under WeBER2.0. At the national level, in each of the WB countries, we have coordinated our work with PAR ministries and/or offices which have had an associate role on the project. At the regional level, WeBER2.0 is cooperating with the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), Southeast Europe Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) coalition, and the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management initiative (SIGMA, a joint initiative of the EU and the OECD), which performs regular assessments of the WB countries' progress in the implementation of the Principles of Public Administration in the period leading up to the EU accession.

Furthermore, within the regional WeBER Platform and National PAR Working Groups (NWGs), we have continued to cooperate with over a 130 CSOs operating at the local and regional level.

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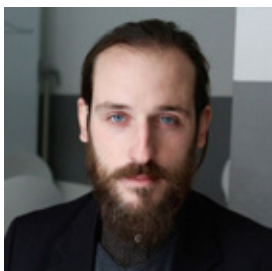
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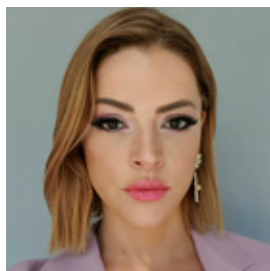
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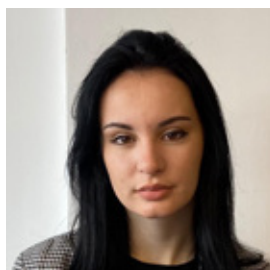
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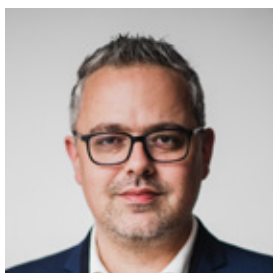
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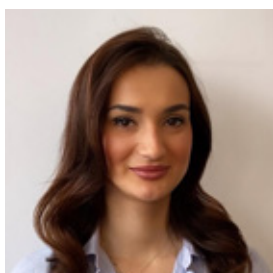
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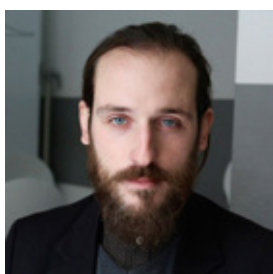
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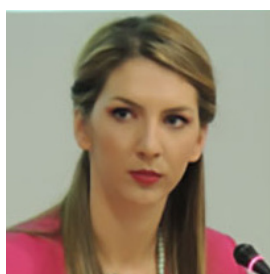
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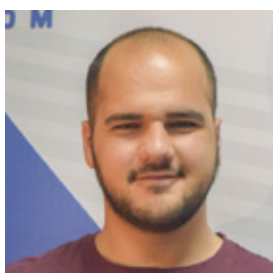
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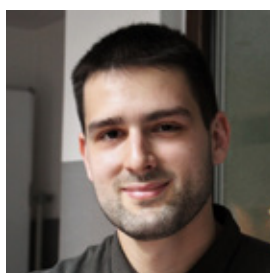
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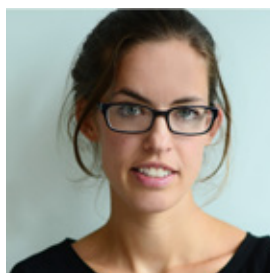
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The PAR Monitor 2019/2020 is the result of monitoring work performed in 2020 by the members of the Think for Europe Network, and it represents a compilation report of key findings from across the Western Balkans in the six areas of PAR defined by the Principles of Public Administration (SIGMA principles). As the second systematic PAR monitoring done in the region by civil society, this report offers not only comparisons between Western Balkan (WB) administrations, but also comparison with the baseline PAR Monitor findings of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle.

PAR Monitor reports are based on a comprehensive methodological framework designed by the WeBER research team that combines quantitative and qualitative sources of evidence. With the SIGMA principles as the building blocks of monitoring work, PAR Monitor reports are complementary to similar work by SIGMA/OECD and the European Commission, differing in that they offer citizen and civil society perspectives on these principles. Together with this comparative regional report, the PAR Monitor package consists of six national reports, each including findings on a total of 23 compound indicators to monitor a selection of SIGMA Principles.

In line with the mission of the WeBER initiative, these monitoring exercises are driven by the necessity to strengthen domestic, bottom-up pressure for PAR from civil society in the region, especially from the view of keeping demand for this reform ongoing in the event of the loosening of the EU's conditionality which may come with membership in the Union. All findings from this report and from the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/2018 can be accessed and compared on the Regional PAR Scoreboard at www.par-monitor.org.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR PAR

WeBER monitors civil society involvement in both the development and monitoring of implementation of the **strategic framework for PAR**. Mirroring the baseline PAR Monitor, findings suggest that all administrations involve CSOs and the public in the development of strategic PAR documents to a certain degree. Nevertheless, practices continue to vary greatly between (or within) administrations in terms of meeting basic consultation requirements. Early involvement in development processes is still an exception, with one case recorded each in North Macedonia (formalistic) and Serbia (substantial). At the same time, no universal standards are applied in terms of the openness of consultations on the strategic development of PAR, and practices of informing and reaching out to stakeholders are thus, for the most part, unpredictable or inconsistent in the region. Still, there are noteworthy cases of proactiveness in which responsible institutions invited CSOs with wide open invitations. On the other hand, administrations have been slightly more proactive in inviting business associations and organisations working on gender and disability issues to participate. In any case, consultation practices generally suffer from the insufficient and non-transparent provision of feedback. Based on evidence from this monitoring cycle, in half of the analysed cases no consultation reports were published, or no comments were gathered from the public. When consultation reports were publicly disclosed, consultees' comments were usually addressed individually (Kosovo and Serbia) or in groups (BIH). Overall, monitoring revealed slightly more weaknesses in consultation practices, and there is a need to standardise consultations on strategic frameworks as practices remain highly uneven, both across the region and across PAR strategic documents within administrations.

The participation of civil society in PAR monitoring and coordination is still a scattered rather than standard practice in the region, and no administration involves CSOs in both levels of PAR coordination, administrative and political. CSO involvement is formally envisaged at the political level in Albania (previously formally ensured for both levels upon invitation), and in Montenegro (as members of the PAR Council), whereas in Serbia full membership of CSOs is foreseen at the administrative level (in the Inter-ministerial Project Group - IMPG). Nevertheless, results from practice display ineffective CSO involvement. In Albania, there is no evidence of CSOs being invited to participate in any meetings, so their role remains on paper only. In Montenegro, the PAR Council has turned down some CSO requests for convening PAR Council sessions. Despite the renewed CSO membership in IMPG in Serbia preceded by an open call, meetings are infrequent while CSOs report that they have no impact on the agenda. Overall, the poor involvement of CSOs points out once again broader issues in the region such as underdeveloped policy monitoring and coordination structures and practices, disregard of civil society's potential to contribute to the implementation of PAR, and the limited functionality of existing PAR coordination and monitoring structures in general.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION

In the area of **policy development and coordination**, WeBER monitors the transparency of governments' reporting and decision-making, the use of civil society analyses and evidence in policymaking, and the inclusiveness of policymaking practices through public consultations.

Governments in the region still do not adequately publish performance information on their work. Communication through press releases is fairly common, but less so when it comes to annual work and performance reports. The CoM of BIH has kept up with its good practice of consistently publishing annual reports, and improvements in regularity of publishing are noted in North Macedonia and Montenegro. Half of the governments in the region have reader-friendly approaches to annual reporting (BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia), but information on results, rather than activities, remains scarce. Implementation reports for whole-of-government strategic plans are the rarest in Albania (33%) and most common in Serbia (80%). Surveyed CSOs in the region mostly believe that governments do not pursue planned objectives, and 47% disagree there is a direct connection between government workplans and actual policy developments. Also, the majority of CSOs disagree that governments regularly report to the public on how they meet policy objectives (58%).

On the transparency of governmental decision-making, results are almost identical to those of the baseline PAR Monitor. Only 13% of surveyed CSOs in the region agree that their government's decision-making is generally transparent. Analysis of publicly released materials following government sessions shows that most governments still provide information on their activities through press releases and the publication of adopted decisions and documents, while agendas and minutes from sessions of governments remain hidden from the public in half of the region (Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia).

Since the baseline PAR Monitor, policymaking bodies in the region have used CSO evidence to a slightly higher degree in their policy development. References to CSOs' findings are still more frequently found in adopted policy documents than in policy papers or impact assessments. As in the previous monitoring cycle, 38% of surveyed CSOs agree that government institutions invite them to prepare or submit policy papers and studies. Perceptions remain favourable when CSOs were asked how often government institutions accept their invitations to participate in events promoting CSOs' policy products (52%). Perceptions of CSOs' involvement in policymaking working groups remain less positive, with 57% noting that ministries rarely or never justify the acceptance or rejection of proposals they make in such forums.

There is still little public involvement in the adoption of legislation and policy documents, and it has a largely insignificant impact. Public authorities rarely publish consultation reports when they conduct consultations, with somewhat better practice noted for formal public debates preceding government approval of bills. In most cases in BIH, Kosovo, and Montenegro, and in over 70% of cases in Serbia, public debates end with the publication of reports. However, reports do not always list all individual comments, so it is often unclear whether

they were accepted or not and why. Though public consultation portals exist across the region, they fail to satisfy either the basic or advanced criteria of functionality. Perception of CSOs informs there is no change in opinions, compared to the baseline monitoring cycle, on whether government institutions consistently apply consultation procedures when developing policies, with only 22% agreeing. The majority of CSOs in the region believe that ministries rarely or never provide written feedback on their inputs during consultations or consult them at the early phases of policy development (56%).

PUBLIC SERVICE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In the **Public Service and Human Resource Management** area, WeBER focuses on public availability of information related to public service, hiring of temporary staff, transparency and merit character of civil service recruitment, selection and the position of senior staff and civil service integrity measures.

A lack of fully functioning and comprehensive information systems on public servants remains a challenge across the region. Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia have put more effort into developing reliable systems, but desirable standards are yet to meet. The governments in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia more proactively disseminate data about their civil service than other administrations.

The regulation of temporary engagements remains an issue. Administrations generally do not prescribe specific criteria for the selection of temporarily engaged staff, and the duration of such appointments lacks stricter regulation. Apart from in Serbia, there are no statutory limits to the number of temporary engagements in the entire administrations. Hiring procedures for temporary positions are assessed as most open and transparent in Kosovo, with clear limits on the duration of contracts. Civil servants mostly perceive temporary hiring as a common and poorly regulated practice, with the most negative perception in North Macedonia.

All public administrations are found to partially meet criteria for the transparency and fairness of recruitment procedures for civil servants. Montenegro and Serbia have invested efforts to make public competitions more accessible. Compared to the baseline monitoring (2017/2018), a slightly higher percentage of civil servants believe that recruitment procedures are merit-based. Major objections region-wide include that there is theoretically no option for candidates to supplement missing documents during application processes and that clarifications made for individual candidates during application processes are not made publicly available by administrations.

Assessment of political interference in public administration remained largely negative. High shares of uncompetitive appointments to high civil service positions, including acting statuses, continue to be a problem in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Most surveyed civil servants in the region believe that senior civil servants are appointed based on political support and that dismissal procedures are not properly applied. In addition, CSOs believe there are high levels of political influence on senior civil servants, which impacted lowering the scores for Albania.

With the exception of Kosovo, remuneration systems in the Western Balkan administrations are partially or fully simply structured and some types of information about salary systems are available to the public. Albanian and Serbian laws on salaries are the sole in the region with clearly defined and limited supplements.

Legal and policy frameworks for public sector integrity are in place with different levels of completeness. Region-wide, legal frameworks cover whistle-blower protections, ethical guidelines, and requirements to disclose assets. Some identified issues include limited provisions on secondary employment for civil servants (Albania) and on the receipt of gifts/benefits (Serbia). Surveyed civil servants in the region are generally pessimistic about the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, with only 14% stating they would feel protected as whistle-blowers.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In the **Accountability** area, WeBER monitors the extent to which the right to access public information is consistently applied in practice. To this end, WeBER looks at the experiences CSOs in using FOI legislation and analyses the proactive informing of the public through the websites of sampled public authorities.

Since the baseline PAR Monitor, CSOs in the WB have continued to express largely negative views on how the FOI system is implemented. Overall, one fifth of surveyed CSOs believe that public authorities record sufficient information to enable rights to the free access to information, with more than a third believing the opposite (39%). Although CSOs have expressed slightly more positive attitudes on the adequacy of exceptions to the public release of information (32%), they remain concerned with how these exceptions are applied in practice. As in the previous cycle, civil society actors tend to confirm they often or always receive requested information free of charge (75% on average) with 43% saying they have been never, or rarely, been asked for reasons behind their requests.

However, their experience with requesting information with classified parts is still limited. Although reduced compared to the baseline PAR Monitor, a high share of CSOs does not know if non-classified sections are released in practice (37%). They continue, however, to have more informed views on accessing information with personal data, as one third (32%) claims that parts of requested information which do not contain personal data are often or always released. The share of CSOs believing that public authorities release partial information with the intention of misleading requesters remains high (47% as opposed to 43% in 2017/18).

Finally, perceptions of the impacts of FOI supervisory bodies are yet again split between Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia, where CSOs tend to be more approving, and BIH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, where they are on average more critical. Replacing their Albanian peers in this cycle, CSOs in Kosovo emerge as the most positive in the region when asked if their supervisory body had set sufficiently high standards (63% of agreement), whereas the agreement among the CSOs in Serbia to this question has fallen by 15 percentage points, to 45%. The same pattern repeats when they were asked if soft measures are effective in FOI protection, but with an even sharper decline in the perception of Serbian CSOs - by 35 percentage points. CSOs in Montenegro provided the most negative responses to both questions.

On average, almost the same share of CSOs do not see sanctions for the violation of the right to information as sufficiently grave for those responsible, at 43%, with just above a fifth believing they are severe enough. Albania remains the positive outlier, with an absolute majority of CSOs agreeing that sanctions are sufficiently grave.

In keeping with the baseline PAR Monitor, state administration bodies mostly meet criteria regarding the completeness and updating of information published on their websites. That information is, however, not equally accessible, and even to a smaller degree made citizen friendly. This means that a significant portion of the information remains published in a bureaucratic fashion, without using simplified language or presentation. Institutions rarely publish annual work reports (except for BIH and Montenegro), whereas limited budget transparency remains as prominent as ever. Serbia is still the only notable exception in this regard, as its administrative bodies publish budgetary data in their information booklets. On a positive note, institutions have demonstrated more proactiveness this time around in providing information through their websites regarding how they cooperate with the public and civil society, including how they perform public consultation processes.

SERVICE DELIVERY

WeBER's approach to monitoring **administrative service delivery** is citizen-oriented, relying to a large extent on public and civil society perceptions about the availability and accessibility of services. Overall, results show a positive trend in public opinion across the region as compared to the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, with a significant increase in satisfaction in some areas. Administrations' efforts at improving service delivery

have generally become more visible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which easy and especially contactless access to administrative services has become ever more important.

In the area of citizen-oriented administration, public perception findings show a positive overall trend. More than half of Western Balkan citizens believe that dealing with their administrations has become easier in the past two years. They consider that it takes less time to obtain administrative services and they recognise the efforts of their governments to simplify administrative procedures. Additionally, WB citizens are increasingly aware of governments' efforts to digitalise the work of public administration and to offer digital services. On the other hand, although citizens are also progressively more informed about how to use e-services, actual use remains limited; more than half of those who are informed reported they had used them rarely or never in the previous 2 years. The vast majority of those who did use them rate them as easy to use, as in the previous monitoring cycle. Finally, more people believe that administrations proactively asked for citizens' proposals to improve service delivery in the past 2 years and that such proposals resulted in actual improvements.

Slightly more than half of Western Balkan citizens confirm that, as users of administrative services, they have opportunities to provide their direct feedback on the quality of services they receive. This share of the population finds such feedback channels somewhat easy to use, but a third have not used them. Additionally, survey results show a shift from mostly negative to mostly positive opinions regarding citizen or CSO involvement in monitoring of service delivery in the past 2 years. Citizens also largely believe that such bottom-up monitoring contributes to the improvement of services. On the other hand, the websites of administrative service providers reveal that administrations seldom report on user feedback; in most administrations, basic information was found for only one out of five sampled services.

Contrary to overall positive public attitudes, deep issues of accessibility of administrative services to vulnerable groups produced pessimistic results in the survey of civil society organisations in the region, as was the case in the 2017/2018 survey. While opinions are slightly more positive regarding the choice of channels for accessing services (such as digital or face-to-face), negative perceptions peak regarding questions on how service provision is adapted to vulnerable groups.

Finally, administrations vary in how well they provide information to service users through their websites. The five sampled services in each administration revealed that they mostly publish basic contact information, documents and information users need to submit, as well as information on fees. In parts of the region, however, users face difficulties in finding how to access services (for example, steps in the process) and simple audio-visual guidance through services.

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

In the area of **Public Financial Management**, WeBER monitors the availability of budgetary data along with the external communication practices. Official websites are reviewed to assess the transparency and accessibility of annual budget data, how governments communicate with citizens about PIFC, the availability of public procurement information, and the degree to which information is publicly available about the work of SAIs.

Approaches to budgetary transparency are diverse in the region, but there are efforts to increase the amount of publicly available information. Ministries of finance regularly publish state budgets, and various in-year budgetary reports are available, although they are not necessarily easily accessible or regularly published. In Montenegro and Serbia, the transparency is undermined by the fact that mid-year reports are unpublished, the same as in the 2017/18 cycle. At the same time, reports are the least comprehensive in these two administrations as they mostly focus on economic expenditures, unlike in the rest of the region where they provide more data by budget users and government functions. In North Macedonia and Kosovo, budget transparency is enhanced with new, citizen-friendly budget portals. Still, there is no progress regarding the publication of non-financial performance information, with Albania remaining the only example where such data is available for line ministries. Citizen budgets are yet to be produced in Montenegro, and annual budgets are available in open format in North Macedonia only.

PIFC transparency in the region remains unchanged and opportunities for public scrutiny are quite limited. Although ministries of finance (except for Kosovo) publish annual consolidated reports, the proactive publication of internal audit quality reviews is entirely absent outside of Serbia. Regarding internal control policies, monitoring shows no tangible improvements as ministries still do not disclose even basic information through their websites. The Parliamentary Assembly in BIH was the only legislature to regularly review annual PIFC reports in this monitoring cycle.

Central authorities regularly publish annual reports on public procurements, except for BIH. Reporting is mostly reader-friendly and with various statistical and qualitative insights. In addition, all the central authorities in the region run procurement portals with different user functions and content, but full access to tender documents is possible for registered users only in most cases. Reporting by ministries is significantly less transparent, as they publish annual procurement plans more often than reports, with those in Montenegro being the most consistent. Most central authorities do not publish open data on their websites, but procurement portals in Kosovo and Serbia allow for the export of open data. In 2019, open procedures with publishing of a call represented the main method for implementing procurements, representing over 90% in three cases, and slightly below in two cases (for BIH data was unavailable).

Finally, across the region, SAIs have considerably strengthened their public communication. In Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, they implement communication strategies. All SAIs have at least one job position tasked with public communication, this time with no exceptions in the region. These institutions are diversifying the tools they use to inform the public, with three of them actively using social media, and all of them producing tailored products, more accessible to citizens. Importantly, citizen-friendly audit summaries are more common, and the SAIs in BIH, Montenegro, and Serbia publish simplified versions of all, or the majority, of audit reports. As previously, SAIs generally accept citizen complaints and suggestions, yet only in Albania and North Macedonia are there channels explicitly dedicated to the submission of audit tips. Finally, the majority of SAIs consult with CSOs, with Kosovo's KNAO regularly holding (and formalising in 2020) civil society forums to discuss audit priorities.

This second PAR Monitor shows that when it comes to prioritising citizens in their administrative reforms the governments in the region still face similar challenges and drawbacks to those identified in the baseline report. An exception, to an extent, is found in the service delivery area, where in most cases citizens have recognised improvements, with resulting higher indicator scores and values. Yet, similar results for most indicators in the two monitoring cycles lead to two main conclusions. First, that tangible improvements in the citizen-facing elements of PAR that WeBER looks at take more than two years to materialise. Second, that in all areas of PAR (with the exception of service delivery), governments in the region are still predominantly focused on internal reforms, such as those aimed at improving capacities or streamlining processes and procedures.

Nevertheless, the results from this PAR Monitor edition do reveal some notable developments, some positive and others negative. As presented in this report's featured good practices and those to avoid, administrations have in some cases discontinued what was previously deemed good practice. Such backsliding demonstrates the fragility of administrations' practices and the necessity to continue to commit to maintaining sufficient levels of transparency and openness towards citizens, needed to move forward in the EU accession process. That said, results once again suggest that the governments most advanced in the EU accession process – Montenegro and Serbia – do not necessarily take a lead in PAR in general, or in individual reform areas. At the same time, other administrations have not made great advances either, and have in some cases even backslid.[1]

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1   The PFM results, on the first look, may suggest greater advances by North Macedonia and Montenegro, but those leaps are owed to the introduction of a new public procurement indicator for the most part.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACC	Accountability
ADISA	Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania
ALB	Albania
ALSAI	Supreme State Audit Institution of Albania
AOI BIH	Audit office the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina
AP	Action Plan
BCSDN	Balkan Civil Society Development Network
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BRS	Better Regulation Strategy
BSL	Budget System Law
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interviewing
CAWI	Computer-assisted web interviewing
CHU	Central harmonisation unit
COCS	Commissioner for the Oversight of the Civil Service
CoG	Centre of Government
CoM	Council of Ministers
CSA	Civil Service Agency
CSL	Civil Service Law
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DoPA	Department of Public Administration
eID	Electronic Identification
ENER	Single National Electronic Registry of Regulations
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FBIH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
FMC	Financial management and control
FOI	Freedom of Information
GAWP	Government Annual Work Plan
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRMIS	Human Resource Management Information Systems
IA	Internal Audit
IMPG	Inter-Ministerial Project Group
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
ISSAI	International standards of supreme audit institution
KNAO	National Audit Office of Kosovo
KOS	Kosovo

LAP	Law on administrative procedure
MAP	Ministry of Public Administration of Kosovo
MISA	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
MKD	Macedonia
MNE	Montenegro
MPALSG	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government
NALED	National Alliance for Local Economic Development
NPEI	National Plan for European Integration
NPISAA	National Programme for Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Public Administration
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PARCO	Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office
PDC	Policy development and coordination
PFM	Public Financial Management
PIFC	Public Internal Financial Control
PSHRM	Public Service and Human Resource Management
RIA	Regulatory impact assessment
RS	Republic of Srpska
RTI	Global Right to Information Rating
SAI	Supreme Audit Institution
SAO	State Audit Office of North Macedonia
SCS	Senior Civil Service/Senior civil servants
SD	Service delivery
SEE	South-eastern Europe
SFPAR	Strategic framework for public administration reform
SIGMA	Support in Improvement in Governance and Management
SIPPC	Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination
SRB	Serbia
UK	The United Kingdom
VAT	Value-added tax
WB	Western Balkans
WeBER	Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform
WeBER2.0	Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a Reformed Public Administration
XML	Extensible Markup Language

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AND THE WESTERN BALKANS' EU INTEGRATION – WHY IS MONITORING IMPORTANT?

Since the publication of the first edition of the Western Balkan PAR Monitor in 2018, the Western Balkan region (WB) has continued slowly their path towards further democratisation and modernisation of its societies, implementing the necessary structural, economic, and social reforms to improve the lives of citizens. These reform processes were, from their onset, stimulated by aspirations of becoming members of the EU, and they continue to be driven by the EU integration process and its inherent conditionalities. Good governance lies at the heart of the European integration project, requiring public administrations to be professional, reliable and predictable, open and transparent, efficient and effective, and accountable to their citizens.

With the new strategy of the European Commission issued in early 2020, public administration reform (PAR) was reaffirmed as an area of fundamental reform in the EU's enlargement policy. Accordingly, PAR joined the areas of rule of law, economic governance, and the functioning of democratic institutions as the basic pillars of reform which will constitute the foundation for the overall assessment of progress of aspiring EU members.

The EU's framework for defining, guiding, and assessing administrative reforms in the context of enlargement has remained embedded in the set of Principles of Public Administration. Established in 2014, these principles, known as the "SIGMA principles" (since they are assessed regularly by the OECD's SIGMA programme)[1] offer a roadmap for EU candidates to follow and comply with in PAR while working to become successful EU member states. The European Commission (EC) and SIGMA worked together to define the scope of these principles of public administration,[2] structured around six key areas:

1. strategic framework for public administration reform
2. policy development and coordination
3. public service and human resource management
4. accountability
5. service delivery
6. public financial management

These principles, thus, constitute the common denominator of PAR for all EU aspirants, guiding the course of their reforms in the direction of EU membership.[3]

WeBER[4] adopted the Principles of Public Administration as the main building block of its PAR Monitor for two main reasons. On the one hand, as a common denominator for PAR reforms in the region, the principles allow for comparisons across the region, and regional peer learning and peer pressure among the WB administrations. On the other hand, the principles guide reforms in these countries towards the fulfilment of EU membership conditionalities, thus helping their transformations into future EU member states.

An important consideration in designing WeBER's monitoring approach lies in the understanding that until the EU accessions of the WB region, SIGMA/OECD will be engaged in the region, relying also on the hard EU conditionalities as an external driving force of reforms. Until that time, local civil society can deliver complementary findings in their focus areas. Simultaneously, civil society should also gradually expand the scope of its monitoring and seek ways to continue with this process in a more holistic way in the post-accession period, when SIGMA will no longer have the mandate to perform external assessments of PAR. By that time,

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1   SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU, principally funded by the EU. Its key objective is to strengthen the foundations for improved public governance, hence supporting socioeconomic development in the regions close to the EU by building capacities in the public sector, enhancing horizontal governance, and improving the design and implementation of public administration reforms, including proper prioritisation, sequencing, and budgeting. More information is available at: http://www.sigmaweb.org/.

2   Principles of Public Administration for EU candidates and potential candidates: https://bit.ly/395diWq. A separate document entitled The Principles of Public Administration: A Framework for ENP Countries has been developed for the countries falling under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): http://bit.ly/2fsCaZM.

3   SIGMA conducts regular assessments of the progress made by WB governments in their fulfilment of their principles. Across-the-board assessments (for all the six key areas) are conducted once every two-three years, and smaller-scale assessments are conducted in between for specific chapters that are evaluated as critical by SIGMA. For more information on SIGMA assessments, visit www.sigmaweb.org.

4   Starting from December 2019, WeBER is being implemented under the title "WeBER2.0 - Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a Reformed Public Administration".

local civil society actors should have a developed approach in identifying critical areas of intervention on which to focus their monitoring efforts.

Moreover, although EU conditionality is currently ensuring regular external monitoring and assessment of reforms progress, previous enlargements have demonstrated that some countries have backslid in their reforms post-accession, effectively moving away from good governance standards. In several countries, governments have decreased their standards of transparency, administrations have been re-politicised, and anti-corruption efforts have faded. WeBER's rationale is that only by empowering local non-governmental actors and strengthening participatory democracy at the national and local levels can pressure on governments be maintained to implement often painful and inconvenient administrative reforms in the post-accession period.

In order to contribute to the empowerment of local civil society actors, WeBER has initiated multiple awareness raising and capacity building initiatives since 2015. In addition to involving and gathering the knowledge of CSOs in the PAR monitoring process and the creation of the PAR monitor reports, a number of regional CSOs were trained for PAR monitoring and advocacy. Moreover, local CSOs who monitor specific PAR areas at the local level were provided with mentoring. In addition, multiple rounds of consultations on the implementation of the PAR Monitor were organised in the framework of the regional WeBER platform, and SIGMA's principles were introduced to a wider group of CSOs in the region. Today, WeBER continues to initiate novel, civil-society approaches to PAR such as piloting monitoring exercises of mainstreaming PAR in different policy sectors, and the creation of six parallel online portals through which citizens are invited to share their experiences in interacting with public administrations.[5]

Finally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is an additional reminder of the importance of well-functioning public administrations able to exercise primary functions of serving the needs of citizens. Moreover, these outstanding circumstances bring to the fore the issue of public administrations' ability to adapt and go the extra mile in delivering services digitally, enabling contactless, yet unhampered communication with citizens, and providing teleworking options for civil service employees.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, WeBER researchers produced PAR monitoring cycle 2019/2020 almost entirely as a remote exercise. This meant virtual communication and coordination within the WeBER research team and shifts in its approach of conducting field work (such as interviews and focus groups) in certain cases. Pandemic-related circumstances have, generally, had a limited impact on the project's findings, as most of the analysed practices took place in the pre-pandemic period (2019). Nevertheless, to some extent the pandemic slowed down the monitoring process as for a while it was more difficult to access public information with FOI requests. Other major obstacles, however, were not encountered.

I.2 THE PAR MONITOR METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

■ EU principles as a starting point and common framework of reference

As mentioned above, WeBER approaches the monitoring of PAR in the Western Balkans from the perspective of uniform requirements posed by the EU accession process for the entire region. As the EU and SIGMA/OECD have developed a comprehensive set of principles for all countries to transform their administrations into modern, EU member states, WeBER has used these principles as the golden standard and a starting point for, firstly, developing and then implementing its own monitoring methodology. Moreover, in line with its overall rationale, WeBER has emulated SIGMA's methods to create its own indicators, using a similar compound-indicator structure and the same scoring approach, with the quantification of elements (sub-indicators) and total scores assigned to indicator values on a scale from 0 to 5.

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5   The citizens portals for the six administrations are available at: https://citizens.par-monitor.org/.

This approach acknowledges that SIGMA's comprehensive approach cannot and should not be replicated by local actors, as it already represents a monitoring source independent from national governments in the WB. In this sense, WeBER does not seek to present a contesting (competitive) assessment of how these principles are fulfilled in the WB administrations, but rather offer a complementary view, based in local knowledge and complementary research approaches.

■ The regional approach

An important facet of the WeBER monitoring of PAR is its regional character. The regional approach implies that all indicators are framed and phrased in a manner which enables application to six different systems that are assessed. Second, the regional approach means that findings are regionally comparable.

Such a regional approach admittedly results in some degree of loss of detail and national specificity in the monitoring work. However, it presents many benefits compared to nationally-specific approaches. First and foremost is the potential to compare different national results, which allows the benchmarking of countries and their systems, the recognition of good, as well as the rise of positive competition between governments. Last, but not least, it allows for the creation of regional knowledge and peer learning regarding PAR among CSOs, particularly useful for inspiring new initiatives and advocacy efforts at the national level.

■ Selection of principles "for and by civil society"

The PAR Monitor maintains a basic structure which follows the six chapters of the Principles of Public Administration. It does not attempt to monitor all the principles under each chapter, nor does it seek to monitor them in a holistic manner, but it rather adopts a more focused and selective approach. The criteria for selecting the principles to be monitored (and their sub-principles) were developed with three main ideas in mind:

- There are certain principles in which civil society is more active and consequently has more knowledge and experience;
- In order to gain momentum, the PAR Monitor will need to be relevant to the interests of the wider public in the region;
- The approach should ensure an added value to SIGMA's work and not duplicate it.

The WeBER monitoring approach utilises the experience and expertise accumulated within the civil sector in the region to the maximum extent possible. Therefore, a number of indicators rely on civil society as a core source of knowledge.

■ Focus on the citizen-facing aspects of administration

Another key criterion which has guided the WeBER's selection of principles (and sub-principles) **is their relevance to the work and interests of the wider public**. This means that both the selection of the principles and the design of the indicators included questions such as: "Does the public care about this?" or "Is this aspect of public administration visible to ordinary citizens?" In keeping with this approach, the WeBER methodology retains a focus on the points of interaction between the administration and its users (citizens and businesses), while leaving out issues that constitute the internal operating procedures of the administration invisible to the public.

■ WeBER indicator design

The WeBER research team designed a set of compound indicators in 2016, with each comprising several elements (essentially sub-indicators), elaborating various aspects of the issue addressed by the entire indicator. The entire design of indicators is quantitative, in the sense that all findings – based on both quantitative and qualitative research – are assigned numerical values. Findings are used to assess the values of individual

elements, assigning them total element scores of either 0 or 1 (for less complex assessments, such as those where a simple yes or no answer is possible) or 0 or 2 (for more complex assessments). Only integer values are assigned to elements.

Furthermore, for each element a weight of either 1 or 2 is applied. In principle, a weight of 2 is assigned to those evaluated as basic, key requirements in relation to a certain practice. A weight of 1 is applied to more advanced requirements, i.e. higher and more complex standards. For example, a weight of 2 would be applied for an element assessing a basic government reporting practice, whereas a weight of 1 would be applied to an element assessing whether the data in a report is gender sensitive or whether it is available in an open data format. Moreover, as most indicators combine different research approaches and data sources, in cases where perception survey findings are combined with hard data analysis, a weight of 1 is assigned to the former and a weight of 2 to the latter.

Finally, for each indicator there is a conversion table for transforming total scores from analyses of individual elements into values on a common scale from 0 to 5. The final indicator values are assigned only as integers, meaning, for instance, there are no half points assigned. The scoring and methodology details for each indicator are available on the PAR Monitor section of the WeBER website.[6]

■ Main methodological changes between the two PAR Monitors

Experience from the design of the monitoring methodology and the implementation of the first PAR Monitor resulted in the three main changes in relation to indicators in this monitoring cycle.

Firstly, in the Policy Development and Coordination area, the WeBER team has enhanced the indicator focusing on the quality of public participation (through various forms of public consultations) in policymaking. At first focusing only on perceptions of CSOs collected through an online survey, additional elements were added to assess the quality of public involvement in practice, examining a sample of public consultations on policy documents and legal acts. The improvement of this indicator also includes an assessment of governmental public consultation/participation portals though two new elements (sub-indicators). With this change, WeBER assessments in this PAR area were made more balanced in general, combining CSOs perceptions with hard evidence in each topic covered (which include governmental performance reporting, the use of evidence by central state administration bodies in policy development, and the transparency of governmental decision making).

Secondly, a couple of indicators that were initially planned for the first PAR monitoring cycle were at that time left out due to a combination of limited staff capacities and challenging workload. It was then agreed that a public-procurement-related indicator would be introduced in the second monitoring cycle. As a result, a new indicator has now been added to the Public Financial Management area, covering public procurement policy. Measured for the first time, this indicator on public procurement sets baseline values in this PAR Monitor.

Finally, one indicator in the Policy Development and Coordination area (focusing on the accessibility of legislation and explanatory materials to the public) was not included in this monitoring edition. The WeBER team reached a decision on this reduction at the beginning of this monitoring cycle. This decision came after internal deliberations on feedback received from CSOs in the region based on the survey conducted within the first monitoring cycle, and on the internal capacities of the research team to deal with an increased number of indicators. Consequently, in terms of the priority and urgency of addressing different PAR issues, it was decided that the indicator on legislation availability would give way to the indicator on public procurement.

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6   WeBER project website: http://www.par-monitor.org. The methodology and individual indicator tables can be accessed within the PAR Monitor menu.

■ The PAR Monitor package

The PAR Monitor is composed of one regional, comparative report of monitoring results for the entire region and six national reports that elaborate the monitoring findings for each administration in greater detail. In line with this approach, the regional report focuses on comparative findings, regional trends, and examples of good or bad practices, but does not provide recommendations. The national reports, on the other hand, provide in-depth, country-specific findings and identify a set of recommendations for national policy makers for each PAR area.

The added value of the entire monitoring exercise is that it allows monitoring changes vis-à-vis baseline indicator values from the monitoring conducted in 2017/2018. It also allows stakeholders to reflect on the most important developments and trends in the implementation of policy and in the perceptions of key targeted groups. In certain cases, this reflection allows for some comparisons of results over time, as in the case of public perception surveys on administrative service delivery practices conducted on a representative sample of citizens. In cases of surveys of civil servants and CSOs, the 2019/2020 PAR Monitor allows us to monitor prevailing trends in the opinions of these stakeholder groups as compared to the baseline surveys.[7]

The "Master Methodology" document and the detailed indicator tables, all available on the WeBER website,[8] should also be considered as part of the entire PAR Monitor package and can be used to fully understand the details of this monitoring exercise where needed.

The entire package of reports is also accompanied by an online tool for viewing and comparing the findings from different WeBER monitoring cycles, the Regional PAR Scoreboard. This database of all indicator values and the tables and graphs presenting those values can be found on the project website www.par-monitor.org, under the heading "PAR Monitor". The scoreboard also includes a section for viewing and comparing SIGMA's latest monitoring results for the whole region.

■ Quality assurance procedures within the monitoring exercise

As in the baseline monitoring cycle, this monitoring applied a multi-layered quality assurance procedure to guarantee that the PAR monitoring findings are based on reliable and regionally comparable evidence. That process included both internal and external expert checks and reviews of data. The internal process of quality control comprised two main elements:

1. a peer-review process, which involved different collaborative formats, such as written feedback, online team meetings and workshops;
2. once the scoring for each administration was finalised, the WeBER lead researcher and team leader performed a horizontal cross-check of the findings to ensure their regional comparability and an alignment of assessment approaches, thus preparing the analysis for the external review.

The two phases of the external quality control process include:
- fact-checking by government institutions in charge of the given assessed area;
- Following the drafting of the regional report, members of the WeBER Advisory Council and recognised international experts performed an expert review of the regional PAR Monitor chapters in line with their areas of expertise.

The national reports also underwent standard internal review procedures by each WeBER partner organisation.

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7   As it was not possible to create representative, random samples for the populations of CSOs and civil servants, these two surveys were distributed throughout these two populations, and analysis was done on the received complete responses. Since the samples in the baseline and in this second monitoring cycle are, thus, not identical, the results are not fully comparable. Yet, the overall response rates are solid, allowing us to compare the trends between the two survey cycles.

8   WeBER project website: http://www.par-monitor.org. The methodology and individual indicator tables can be accessed within the PAR Monitor menu.

◼ PAR Monitor 2019/2020 timeframe

The monitoring exercise was conducted between February and December 2020. For the most part, monitoring focuses on practices implemented in 2019 and the first half of 2020. The exception are those indicator elements looking at regularity of governmental reporting practices, where 2018 or 2017 were included as the base years due to the governments' reporting cycles or the requirements of specific indicators.

The individual indicator measurements indicate the exact periods of measurement, kept comparable across the region, which allow for the clear identification of timeframes of reference for all findings in the reports. Where situations have changed by the time of this report's writing, those changes will be reflected in the scores in the next biennial WeBER monitoring cycle and PAR Monitor 2021/2022.

◼ Limitations in scope and approach

The main limitation facing this project stems from the fact that, for reasons which were elaborated above, the PAR Monitor does not cover the entire framework of SIGMA principles, but only those in which the interest of, and added value from, civil society is strongest in the pre-accession period. Moreover, selected principles are not always covered in every angle, but rather in those specific aspects which have been determined by the authors as the most relevant to approach them from the perspective of civil society monitoring. The specific WeBER approach used in all such cases is described in the project's methodology and individual indicator tables.

Importantly, bearing in mind that there was no SIGMA assessment for 2020, for this PAR Monitor cycle WeBER researchers performed their own calculation of the ten SIGMA sub-indicators that WeBER uses in the area of Public Service and Human Resource Management. Done in accordance with SIGMA's methodology, the results of these calculations are the sole responsibility of the WeBER research team and the authors of PAR Monitor reports, and SIGMA/OECD cannot be held responsible for the outcomes of such calculations.

Lastly, despite the changes made in the PDC indicator on inclusiveness of policymaking (elaborated above), some of the principles are still approached from a rather perception-based point of view. This is mainly the case for principles thoroughly monitored by SIGMA, as the most useful way to complement its approach was deemed to be by monitoring perceptions of certain key stakeholder groups (such as public servants and CSOs). This is a deliberate component of the WeBER approach, and those indicators should be looked at as complementary to the assessments conducted by SIGMA for the same principles. Nevertheless, experience from the baseline monitoring cycle exposed limitations in certain cases when relying solely on perception data. An indicator on the inclusiveness and openness of policy making, which was previously entirely based on the perceptions of CSOs, was thus complemented with hard evidence so as to have a more balanced assessment, as described in the section on methodological changes. Such change brought about more objective assessment, as can be seen in this report's analysis. However, the new elements which analyse public consultation practices did not significantly change the picture previously created on the basis of CSO perceptions much, so that at the indicator values have mainly changed from 0 to 1 on average. In the period ahead, WeBER will consider changes if similar adjustments are needed in other indicators, with the view of improving the overall quality of its monitoring albeit keeping in mind the need to maintain a level of comparability between WeBER findings from different monitoring cycles.

In terms of geographical scope, the monitoring exercise and report cover the six administrations of the WB region, in accordance with the EU definition of the region.[9] For BIH, WeBER has again focused predominantly on state level institutions wherever the structures and practices of institutions are analysed. The only exceptions to this are the service delivery indicators, where sampled administrative services include those provided by lower levels of governance in BIH (such as entities).

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9   European Commission's Enlargement package, and progress reports, are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en (last accessed on 23 April 2021).

I.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report follows a standard outline established for the baseline PAR Monitor, and is divided into six chapters, pertaining to the core areas of PAR: 1) strategic framework for public administration reform, 2) policy development and coordination, 3) public service and human resource management, 4) accountability, 5) service delivery, and 6) public finance management. Each chapter follows an identical structure. In a brief chapter introduction, the scope and relevance of a given area for public administration reform overall is provided. The following section contextualises this analysis by providing a brief overview of the regional state of play in the observed area based on existing secondary sources. The state of play section in this PAR Monitor edition largely relies on the latest European Commission progress reports for the Western Balkans for 2020, but also refers to other relevant sources.

Following the state of play section, the report clarifies WeBER's monitoring focus, describing the project's methodological steps in greater detail and illustrating the structure of each principle and indicator, including methods of data collection and analysis. A crucial section of each chapter is the presentation of comparative PAR Monitor findings, the result of thorough and methodologically robust regional research processes. Finally, each chapter finishes with a succinct summary of the key findings for the PAR area in question.

The report ends with a conclusion chapter which provides the "big picture" of the findings and trends observed across the region and between the two monitoring cycles. This comparative regional report does not provide recommendations and does not seek to explore practices of single administrations in depth. Rather, the six national PAR Monitor reports, which elaborate the findings for each administration in detail, extract actionable recommendations for responsible government authorities. In addition to noting the main commonalities and trends which emerge across the WB, the conclusion also discusses how this information could be interpreted regarding the EU accession progress of these administrations. It is the authors' hope that such conclusions can serve to inspire relevant regional and EU-level actors to to plan their policies, messages and actions so to encourage effective reform in the coming years.

II ● STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

The wide scope of public administration reform (PAR) as a policy area means that it extends to a multitude of institutions and processes. As these processes and institutions are, as a rule, of a horizontal character, spanning across different government bodies, all changes required by PAR require implementation across administrative systems. The Principles of Public Administration, with its six areas, clearly demonstrate the width and depth of PAR. Five of these areas tackle specific thematic segments or groups in administrative reform, while a separate chapter precisely tackles the necessity of strategic and institutional frameworks for the design and implementation of this policy.

A proper strategic framework is important because changes in an administrative system need to be planned based on a profound understanding of its current functioning, with a reliance on regularly collected data from the policy implementation. The priorities and objectives of PAR policies need to be made clear, along with performance indicators, targets, and responsibilities. Policies also need to take into consideration the voices of external stakeholders, such as CSOs, as well as facilitate input from the public. A sound strategic framework for PAR also needs to ensure the regular monitoring of its implementation, to ensure good coordination between the multitude of institutions on which its results depend, and to include regular reporting and periodical evaluations to ensure the creation of feedback loops necessary for maintaining evidence-based and relevant policies.

II.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018[10]

The core strategic framework for PAR has been established in all administrations in the region. Since the baseline PAR Monitor, this framework was updated and revised in some cases. At the same time, a few strategic documents formally expired in 2020, and renewed strategic frameworks for the post-2020 period are being prepared or in the approval stage. Nevertheless, in 2020, general PAR and PFM strategic documents were being formally implemented in the Western Balkans, in each case coordinated by two different types of authorities: those responsible for public administration, and those for public finance. The table below lists currently implemented strategic documents regarding PAR and PFM and outlines main developments in the two-year period, from the end of 2018 through the end of 2020, as well as expected ones in the upcoming period.

Table 1: Key strategic framework on PAR and PFM and main developments since 2018

	PAR STRATEGY	Timeframe	Developments	PFM STRATEGY	Timeframe	Developments
ALB	✓	2015-2020	extended AP 18-22 adopted	✓	2014-2020	new strategy 19-22 adopted
BIH	✓[2]	2018-2022	AP 21-23 adopted	✓	2017-2020	2025 under preparation
KOS	✓[3]	2015-2020	new strategy in 2021	✓	2016-2020	AP 19-20 adopted; new expected in 2021
MKD	✓	2018-2022	5-year AP revised	✓	2018-2021	AP 2020 adopted
MNE	✓	2016-2020	new for 21-25 under preparation	✓	2016-2020	updated in 2018; extended to 2021
SRB	✓	2014-2020	strategy 21-30 adopted, with AP 21-25	✓	2016-2020	revised in 2019; new under preparation

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10   The state of play is largely based on the most recent progress reports of the European Commission for Western Balkan administrations. Where needed, other sources have been used and cited individually. All reports are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en (last accessed on 12 January 2021).

11   For BIH, the strategic framework at the state level is presented.

12   Strategy on the Modernization of Public Administration 2018-2020, available at: https://bit.ly/3oCWUIK (last accessed on 12 January 2020).

Importantly, besides PAR and PFM strategies and programmes, strategic frameworks entail other documents that target certain PAR areas directly. In Albania, the strategic framework for service delivery consists of two policy documents adopted in 2015 and 2016. The policy document regarding citizen-centric service delivery is being implemented in stages and in the long term it aims at ensuring the availability of services to all citizens as well as making them fully electronic.[13] Similarly, the action plan for the Digital Agenda Strategy, also targeting e-government reform, was updated and approved in December 2020.[14] Kosovo is currently implementing two strategic documents on reforming policy development: the Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination in Kosovo, and the Revised Better Regulation Strategy. The strategic framework for the BIH institutions consists of PAR and PFM strategies, and the renewed PAR Strategy Action Plan represents an important step towards coordinated reform at all levels. In North Macedonia, the Transparency Strategy is the only example of a separate document in the PAR strategic framework, and it specifically addresses the area of accountability. It was developed for the purpose of improving the reactive and proactive transparency of state bodies and at the same time it complements the existing strategy on open data. The Information Society Development Strategy of Montenegro tackles aspects of eGovernment reform but it expires in 2020, whereas the last action plan was for 2019.[15] In Serbia, a new eGovernment Development Programme is being implemented, while the Strategy for Regulatory Reform and Improvement of Policy Management System, which expired in 2020, awaits its successor in 2021. In sum, administrations in the region do approach PAR by devising umbrella PAR and PFM strategies; in some cases, issue-specific strategic documents are adopted in targeted priority areas of PAR.

PAR coordination remains crucial for effective reform in the region due to its comprehensiveness, complexity, and institutional diversity. In practice, coordination, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms encounter different challenges. Political structures for coordination of PAR are in place in each administration, however political support is at times lacking due to insufficient ownership at all government levels (BIH), frequent government changes (Kosovo), weak links with administrative coordination bodies (Albania), or has slightly decelerated due to changes in the management of the ministry in charge of PAR (North Macedonia). After a somewhat dynamic start, the PAR Council in Montenegro barely met in 2019 and 2020, having had only three sessions in two years. The PAR Council in Serbia convened more regularly in 2019, with two sessions, but only one in 2020.

In terms of monitoring and reporting, the main weaknesses in the current setup have to do with insufficient data collection and quality control (Kosovo), or the need to establish coordinated monitoring and reporting systems across the entire PAR strategic framework (Serbia). Data collection and reporting practices for PAR or PFM strategies also need to be shifted towards results-based monitoring (Albania and Kosovo). Moreover, a major concern in almost every administration in the region is financial sustainability; PAR remains largely dependent on external, donor funding and even when reforms are costed in separate budget programmes, there is not always a link with strategic PAR priorities (Kosovo).

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13   Long-term Policy Document on the Delivery of Citizen Centric Services by Central Government Institutions in Albania, 2016-2025, available at: https://bit.ly/3euilMx (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

14   European Commission, "Albania Report 2020", p. 75, available at: https://bit.ly/2XzyAp2 (last accessed on 12 January 2021).

15   In Montenegro, the Digital Transformation Strategy and the Open Government Strategy were both in the preparation phase during 2020.

II.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

Monitoring the Strategic Framework for Public Administration Reform is based on three SIGMA Principles in this area, focusing on the existence of effective PAR agendas, the implementation and monitoring of PAR, as well as on the existence of PAR management and coordination structures at the political and administrative levels.

Principle 1: The government has developed and enacted an effective public administration reform agenda that addresses key challenges;

Principle 2: Public administration reform is purposefully implemented; reform outcome targets are set and regularly monitored;

Principle 4: Public administration reform has robust and functioning management coordination structures at both the political and administrative levels to steer the reform design and implementation process.

The selected principles are assessed entirely from the view of the quality of involvement of civil society and the public in the processes of developing PAR strategic documents, and in the monitoring and coordination structures that should ensure their purposeful implementation. A focus on inclusiveness and participation aims to determine the extent to which relevant stakeholders' needs and views are consulted and taken into consideration when developing and implementing reform agendas.

For this purpose, two WeBER indicators were developed. The first one focuses on the existence and quality of consultation processes in the development of key PAR strategic documents. A sample of up to six key PAR strategic documents was assessed in each Western Balkan administration. The most comprehensive PAR documents (PAR strategies or similar) and PFM reform documents were selected as mandatory sample units, while the selection of other strategic documents covering the remaining PAR areas was dependent on PAR agendas currently in place. Monitoring was performed by combining data sources to ensure the reliability of results, including the qualitative analysis of strategic documents, and official data that is publicly available or obtained from institutions responsible for PAR. Moreover, analysis of documents was corroborated with the results of semi-structured interviews with representatives of institutions responsible for PAR and focus groups with civil society representatives who participated in consultation processes (where it was impossible to organise focus groups, they were replaced with interviews with civil society representatives). Since strategic documents usually cover multiple years, and their adoption or revision does not necessarily coincide with WeBER monitoring cycles, findings from the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/2018 were carried over for strategic documents that did not undergo revision or were not updated at the time of WeBER monitoring.

The monitoring of the participation of civil society in PAR implementation (in PAR coordination and monitoring structures) considered only the most comprehensive PAR strategic documents being implemented as units of analysis. The intention of this approach was to determine whether efforts exist to better facilitate monitoring and coordination structures in PAR agenda generally. As for the first indicator, review and qualitative assessment of official documents pertaining to the organisation and functioning of these structures was performed, and other data sources were used to corroborate the findings.

II.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 1: THE GOVERNMENT HAS DEVELOPED AND ENACTED AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AGENDA THAT ADDRESSES KEY CHALLENGES

In relation to Principle 1, WeBER monitors the **use of participatory approaches in the development of key PAR strategic documents** (indicator SFPAR_P1_I1). In each administration, the analysed strategic framework included the overall PAR Strategy or the PFM Strategy, with additional relevant strategies also included. The specific elements of these participatory approaches are analysed through nine elements.

Table 2: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for SFPAR_P1_I1 "Use of participatory approaches in the development of key strategic PAR documents"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Consultations with civil society are conducted when documents are developed	4	0	2	0	0	2	2
E2. Consultations with civil society are conducted in an early phase of the development of documents	4	0	0	0	2	2	2
E3. Invitations to civil society to participate in consultations are open	4	4	2	2	2	4	2
E4. Responsible government bodies are proactive in ensuring that a wide range of external stakeholders become involved in the process	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E5. Civil society is provided complete information for the preparation of consultations	4	4	2	2	4	4	2
E6. Comments and input received in consultation processes are considered by responsible government bodies	4	0	2	0	0	4	0
E7. Responsible government bodies publicly provide feedback on the treatment of received comments	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
E8. Responsible government bodies engage in open dialogue with civil society on contested questions	2	0	1	0	0	0	1
E9. Consultations in the development of strategic PAR documents are open to the public	4	2	2	2	2	4	2
Total points	**30**	**10**	**12**	**6**	**10**	**20**	**11**
Indicator value 2019/2020[16]	**0-5**	1	2	1	1	3	2
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	1	1	2	3	2

It is important to emphasise that in this monitoring cycle researchers did not reassess participation approaches for the strategic frameworks that were analysed in the first PAR Monitor 2017/18 that were not revised or updated in the meantime. Instead, results of these analyses were transferred from the previous monitoring cycle, and the findings focus only on newly adopted, changed, or updated strategic frameworks. Table 3 provides information on which strategic documents were analysed for each administration.

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16   Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-10 points = 1; 11-15 points = 2; 16-20 points =3; 21-25 points = 4; 26-30 points = 5.

Table 3: Newly analysed PAR strategic framework, and results taken from the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/18

	NEWLY ANALYSED	TAKEN FROM THE BASELINE PAR MONITOR
ALB	PAR Strategy Action Plan 2018-2022 Public Finance Management Strategy 2018-2022	Long-Term Policy Document on the Delivery of Citizen Centric Services 2016-2025 Cross-Cutting Strategy Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020
BIH	Action Plan for the Implementation of PAR Strategy of BIH 2021-2023	PFM Reform Strategy in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2017-2020
KOS	Action Plan 2019-2020 of the PFM Reform Strategy 2016-2021	Action Plan Implementing the Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration 2018-2020 Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination in Kosovo 2017-2021 Revised Better Regulation Strategy 2017-2021
MKD	Revised Action Plan for the PAR Strategy 2018-2022 Action Plan 2020 of the PFM Programme 2018 - 2021	
MNE	PFM Reform Programme Revision 2016-2020	PAR Strategy 2016-2020 Information Society Development Strategy 2016-2020
SRB	Revised PFM Reform Programme 16-20 and Action Plan July 2019 - December 2020 eGovernment Development Programme 2019-2022	PAR Strategy Action Plan for 2018-2020 Strategy for Regulatory Reform and Improvement of the Policy Management System

As in the baseline PAR Monitor, all administrations feature some form of CSO or public involvement in the development of the analysed strategies, programmes, or action plans but, once again, the minimal criteria for basic consultations were not entirely met.[17] Many other aspects of conducting consultations with civil society also indicate fragile and scattered practices.

Early consultations, as a mechanism for meaningful participation and for informing the planning of strategic framework before major directions of reform have already been decided are still an exception. Only two cases of such consultations with civil society are recorded in this monitoring cycle - in North Macedonia and in Serbia. In North Macedonia, a call published on the ENER consultation portal meant that the revision of the PAR Strategy Action Plan was open for anyone to send comments from the very start.[18] In Serbia's case, preparations for drafting the eGovernment Development Strategy included early consultations with key target groups[19] as well as with CSO representatives who are permanent members of the Coordination Council for eGovernment in Serbia.[20] In both cases, however, there are certain drawbacks to the chosen approaches of early involvement. CSOs in North Macedonia commented that the publication of a notice on the government's e-consultation portal is not enough to allow real early contributions, as it only provides information on the start of the development process without any materials to accompany a notice. In Serbia, despite extensive early consultation activities in line with the Law on Planning System, there was no evidence of broader CSO involvement except for by the members of the Coordination Council.[21]

In terms of openness and manners of reaching out to civil society, practices vary among administrations. In Albania, for instance, work on the PAR Strategy AP was advertised on the government's consultation portal and not by the responsible (or any other) institution, thus limiting the reach of consultations. The same practice was recorded for consultations on the PFM Strategy AP in Kosovo. In BIH, website of the PAR Coordinator's Office (PARCO) and e-consultation portal were both used. In North Macedonia, an invitation for consultation on the PFM Programme Action Plan was only revealed after the FOI request was sent, while the call for contribution to

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17   The indicator element methodology requires the following minimum criteria: 1. Duration of at least 15 days for consultations; 2. Publication of an invitation for contributions together with the draft document(s) through the website of the responsible government body; 3. At least one proactive invitation from the responsible government body to CSOs (mainstream or social media, using the channels of consultative bodies or institutions in charge of CSO relations); 4. At least one face-to-face or virtual meeting with external stakeholders based on an open invitation and containing a discussion session time slot.

18   Single register of legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia, available at: https://ener.gov.mk/Default.aspx (last accessed on 14 January 2021). ENER is used for online consultations as well.

19   Focus groups of citizens, business, the IT sector, and local self-governments, interviews with businesses, and consultations with state bodies and the donor community.

20   The Coordination Council for eGovernment was established in 2017 by the Decision of the Government. Its members are state, university, and Serbian Chamber of Commerce representatives, and members of CSOs. Available at: https://bit.ly/3oJ4ifq (last accessed on 14 January 2021).

21   The Law on Planning System, Official Gazette No. 30/2018, stipulates mandatory notifications on the commencement of work on a policy document, ex-ante impact assessments, consultations in all stages of the process, and final public consultations, available at: https://bit.ly/3dPvd6g (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

the PAR Strategy Action Plan was disseminated through the ENER and the responsible ministry. In Montenegro, only the Ministry of Finance released a call on updating the PFM Reform Programme. Finally, for both documents analysed in Serbia (the PFM Programme revision and the eGovernment Development Strategy), official sources did not reveal a single open invitation to civil society to participate in the drafting process. Public debate on the eGovernment Programme was held at the end of the policy development process.

There are cases, though, of proactiveness in reaching out to CSOs directly. Responsible authorities sent emails to groups of CSOs to participate in the drafting of the PFM Strategy in Albania, and the PAR Strategy Action Plan in BIH. Such proactiveness can be considered good practice only if it also involves open and wide invitations.

Practices to avoid: Restricted PFM consultations in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia

PFM Policy Dialogues in **Kosovo** (November 2018) and **Serbia** (March 2019), and the PFM Sectoral Group meeting in **North Macedonia** (March 2020) were examples of limited openness and non-transparency of consultations on PFM.

In these cases, already-existing platforms with broader purposes were used to consult CSOs on PFM Action Plans. PFM Policy Dialogues in Kosovo and Serbia represent a multi-stakeholder format for discussing PFM reform in general, and selected CSOs were invited via email. Similarly, the PFM Sectoral Group in North Macedonia was tasked with Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) programming, and evidence on consultations was only received as a follow-up to an FOI request, which also revealed that the invited CSOs were given a five-day deadline for the submission of comments. Together with closed approaches to inviting participants and targeting specific CSOs without open calls to participate, these consultation processes were not followed up by written evidence on outcomes.

Administrations have been slightly more proactive in ensuring the participation of a wider range of stakeholders (including trade unions, business associations, gender equality organisations, and organisations representing people with disabilities) and evidence of approaching at least one of these specific target groups was found in Albania, BIH, Kosovo, and Serbia. Trade unions neither took part in, nor were proactively invited to participate in consultations on PAR strategic frameworks for the second monitoring cycle, hinting they are largely perceived as non-essential partners in PAR.

Table 4: Participation of different stakeholder groups in strategy development

	Business associations	CSOs focused on gender equality and women's rights	CSOs focused on disability issues and vulnerable groups
ALB[22]		Albanian Human Rights Group Civil Rights Defenders	
BIH	RS Chamber of Commerce		BiH Foundation for Social Inclusion
KOS	American Chamber of Commerce	Civikos[23]	Civikos
SRB	NALED Association for eGovernment Serbian Chamber of Commerce		

Note: None of the specified stakeholder groups participated in consultations in North Macedonia and Montenegro.

Responsible institutions mostly provided all the basic information and documents for the implementation of consultation processes, such as drafts of strategies (or action plans), information on the duration of consultations, and on ways to submit contributions. There are still examples where even this information was partly or entirely missing, such as for the revision of the PFM Reform Programme in Serbia. Where consultations with civil society were not implemented in the process of developing strategies and programmes, responsible

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22   Two other invitations provided by the Albanian Ministry of Finance and Economy referred to a LGBTI organisation and to a social enterprise for people with disabilities, but the specific names of these organisations were not included.

23   Civikos is a civil society platform established for the purpose of institutionalising cooperation between the civil and state sectors and currently has 207 members, including CSOs focused on gender equality and disability issues. See more at: http://www.civikos.net/en/Home (last accessed on 14 January 2021).

institutions released full information and materials only ahead of final consultations with the public (PFM Strategy revision in Montenegro).

The consideration of comments and the provision of feedback by responsible authorities has not become universal practice since the baseline PAR Monitor. This research informs there were no comments from civil society in the case of one strategic document in Albania, and during formal public debates in Montenegro and North Macedonia there was no evidence that comments for either of the two action plans were considered or feedback sent to participants. The same applies for the PFM Programme in Serbia. The practice of responsible ministries in North Macedonia of not keeping records from consultation processes was noted in the baseline PAR Monitor as well, and in the focus group, CSOs highlighted the fact that the transparency of the process often depends on the willingness of institutions to disclose feedback to consultees.[24] On the other hand, whenever consultation reports were published, comments submitted during consultations were stated and addressed individually (Kosovo and Serbia), or in groups (the uniform practice for e-consultations in BIH), though the contributors of comments are not always visible (Serbia). The table below presents phases at which consultations took place and the availability of reports in each case analysed.

Table 5: Public availability of consultation reports for analysed strategic documents

	STRATEGIC DOCUMENT	CONSULTATION PHASE	CONSULTATION REPORT
ALB	PAR Strategy AP 2018-2022 PFM Strategy 2018-2022	**DRAFT** **DRAFT**	N/a (no comments received) No report published
BIH	AP of PAR Strategy 2021-2023	**DRAFT**	Online consultations Additional (online) consultations
KOS	AP of PFM Strategy 2016-2021	**DRAFT**	Online consultations
MKD	AP of PAR Strategy 2018-2022 AP of PFM Programme 2018 - 2021	**EARLY & DRAFT** **DRAFT**	No reports published
MNE	PFM Reform Programme 2016-2020	**DRAFT**	No comments received
SRB	PFM Reform Programme 2016-2020 eGovernment Development Programme	**DRAFT** **EARLY & DRAFT**	No report published Early consultations; Public debate

An outlying example are the early consultations for the eGovernment Development Programme in Serbia. This consultation report is forty pages long and elaborates in detail on consultations with different stakeholder groups (other than CSOs) during the four-month period in which initial state of play analysis and the definition of policy directions took place. It provides annexes with even more detailed reports from focus groups with citizens and businesses, from a survey of decision-makers, and from the workshops of the Coordination Council. Although rich in information and evidence, it is not structured as a typical consultation report that would allow the assessment of the number of inputs received during consultations and how they were used. The adopted Programme does, however, provide overviews of recommendations from each target group, briefly stating whether they were incorporated and in what section of the Programme.[25]

Looking at whether responsible government bodies engage with external stakeholders beyond official consultation procedures to discuss any outstanding issues, research shows no major evidence of such practices overall. In addition to the example from BIH discussed in the "good practices" textbox below, the Serbian example reveals that CSO participants in the development of the eGovernment Programme had occasional disagreements with the administration over proposals, the definitions of specific measures and indicators, and donor interventions. Generally, interviewees confirmed that these issues were solved relatively quickly as the Programme was created collaboratively.[26]

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24   Focus group with CSOs in North Macedonia, held on 6 November 2020.

25   eGovernment Development Programme, available at: https://bit.ly/3nNjqHt (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

26   Interviews with the MPALSG and a CSO representatives held on 3 November 2020.

> ### Good practices: Additional online consultation on the PAR Action Plan in BIH
>
> The PARCO in **BIH**, as the body responsible for PAR, initiated and implemented an additional online consultation meeting on Zoom with representatives from civil society, academia, and professional associations, along with mandatory public consultations.[27] Reports from both forms of consultations were published (see table 5 above) and CSOs confirmed PARCO's fully open approach to dialogue and the concerns of participants in the focus group, even though there was no outstanding issue as such.[28] The report on additional consultations provides a detailed list of participants and individual comments grouped by PAR chapters. As the participants mostly expressed their general views and concerns rather than concrete proposals, not every input received was treated as accepted or rejected.

Compared to the baseline PAR Monitor, monitoring results appear weaker in this cycle and, as a result, administrations scored fewer points in total. Noteworthy indicator value changes were recorded for BIH, Albania, and North Macedonia. The higher value for BIH came as the result of the positive consultation practice in the newly adopted PAR Strategy AP, whereas the downward development in Albania is the outcome of its insufficiently open and non-transparent process of revising the PAR Strategy AP. North Macedonia was the only case in which brand-new consultation processes were analysed and the absence of any kind of information on their outcomes led to a lower value.

Chart 1: Graph: Indicator values for SFPAR_P1_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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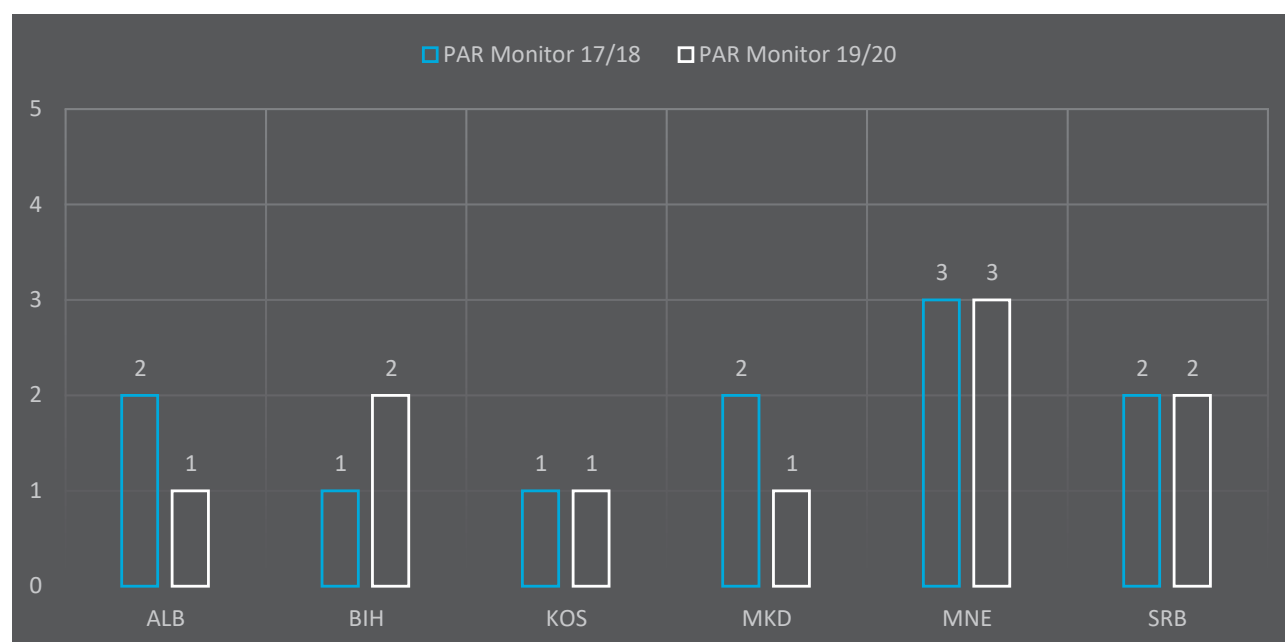
27   Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office: https://bit.ly/2XGSWMX (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

28   Focus group with CSOs held on 2 November 2020.

PRINCIPLE 2: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IS PURPOSEFULLY IMPLEMENTED; REFORM OUTCOME TARGETS ARE SET AND REGULARLY MONITORED

PRINCIPLE 4: PAR HAS ROBUST AND FUNCTIONING MANAGEMENT COORDINATION STRUCTURES AT BOTH THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS TO STEER THE REFORM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

WeBER's approach to these two principles is combined into a single indicator measuring the level of **civil society involvement in PAR monitoring and coordination structures** (indicator SFPAR_P2&4_I1). More specifically, the research looked into the following elements for this indicator:

Table 6: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for SFPAR_P2&4_I1 "Civil society involvement in PAR monitoring and coordination structures"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Administrative structures for PAR coordination and monitoring foresee the involvement of CSOs	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
E2. Political level structures for PAR coordination foresee the involvement of CSOs	2	2	0	0	0	2	0
E3. Format of CSO involvement in administrative structures for PAR coordination and monitoring	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
E4. Format of CSO involvement in political structures for PAR coordination and monitoring	4	2	0	1	0	4	0
E5. Involvement of CSOs is achieved based on an open competitive process	4	2	0	0	0	2	2
E6. Meetings of the PAR coordination and monitoring structures are held regularly with CSO involvement	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E7. The format of meetings allows for discussion with, and contributions and feedback from, CSOs	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
E8. CSOs get consulted on the specific measures of PAR financing	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**26**	**6**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**8**	**10**
Indicator value 2019/2020[29]	**0-5**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**2**
Indicator value 2017/2018		1	0	0	0	2	1

Research showed that Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia remain the only administrations where CSO involvement in any of the PAR monitoring and coordination structures is formally envisaged. Still, in no cases is involvement envisaged in both the administrative and political levels. While CSOs are consulted to an extent in the entire region, the poor involvement of CSOs in PAR monitoring and coordination is still the result of broader issues such as insufficiently developed monitoring and coordination structures, the poor functionality of existing structures, as well as the unrecognised potential of civil society to contribute to PAR implementation. The table below provides an overview of these structures for overall PAR strategies.

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29 Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-9 points = 1; 10-13 points = 2; 14-17 points =3; 18-21 points = 4; 22-26 points = 5.

Table 7: PAR coordination and monitoring structures and participation of CSOs

	POLITICAL LEVEL	CSO membership	ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL	CSO membership
ALB	Integrated Policy Management Group for Good Governance and PAR	CSO members of the National Civil Society Council; subject to invitation	Technical secretariat (Directorate for Policy and Good Governance under the Prime Minister's Office and the Department of Public Administration)	
BIH	CoM BIH Chairman, FBIH and RS Prime Ministers, Brčko District Mayor		PAR Coordinator's Office (PARCO)	
KOS	Ministerial Council of PAR		Department for PAR Management	
MKD	PAR Council		PAR Secretariat	
MNE	PAR Council	2 full-time members; openly selected	Intergovernmental operational team	
SRB	PAR Council[30]		Inter-Ministerial Project Group	24 CSO representatives (each CSO has a full-time member, and a deputy); openly selected

In Albania, civil society remains formally involved in the Integrated Policy Management Group (IPMG) at the political level. Limited to openly selected members of the National Civil Society Council, their involvement remained subject to invitation for each meeting.[31] With a new Decision of the Council of Ministers in 2018, the involvement of CSOs is no longer envisaged in PAR coordination and monitoring at the administrative level.[32] However, CSOs involvement in the IPMG was effectively non-existent in the monitoring period covered by this report. There is no evidence that CSOs took part in, or were even invited to, any of the three meetings of the IPMG, which was confirmed by CSOs who participated in the focus group.

In Montenegro, no changes are observed when it comes to CSO involvement in coordination and monitoring mechanisms. The intergovernmental operational team, formed in January 2018, serves as the de facto administrative structure for PAR and consists of 16 members with no civil society representation.[33] The PAR Council, the political level body, has two full-fledged civil society members, appointed after an open call in 2017.[34] Since no new appointments of CSO members to the PAR Council have taken place in the observed period, these findings mirror those of the baseline PAR Monitor.

The regularity of the Montenegrin PAR Council's meetings diminished in this monitoring cycle, with two sessions in 2019, and one in 2020, perhaps as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to representatives from the CSOs that are full-fledged members of the Council, a number of initiatives they submitted in order to convene sessions have not been answered, and in addition, CSOs were not consulted on measures for PAR financing from the national budget. The website of the PAR Council is still operational, conclusions and materials are published regularly, as well as the PAR Council's annual work reports.[35]

Serbian CSOs are still involved in structures at the administrative level only, as full members of the Inter-Ministerial Project Group (IMPG). The major difference with the baseline PAR Monitor is the basis for CSOs membership. As noted in the previous PAR Monitor, CSO were first appointed based on invitations sent by the responsible ministry to the organisations which lead the PAR sectoral group in the "SEKO mechanism",[36] whereas

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30   The College of State Secretaries, the political-level monitoring and coordination body below the PAR Council, ceased to exist following the 2018 PAR Strategy revisions.

31   The National Council for Civil Society has the mission of ensuring institutional cooperation with civil society. It was established on the initiative of the government in Albania (Law no. 119/2015 "On the Establishment and Functioning of the National Council for Civil Society"), more at: http://www.amshc.gov.al/ (last accessed on 3 February 2021).

32   Order of the Prime Minister no. 157, date 20 October 2018, "On the measures taken to implement the broad sectoral/intersectoral approach and the establishment of integrated sectoral/intersectoral mechanism".

33   The Union of Municipalities of Montenegro is represented, but as it was established according to the legal act on local self-government, it cannot really be considered as part of civil society.

34   Decision of the Ministry on the selection of the PAR Council from members from the civil society: https://bit.ly/2XIYKpu (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

35   Annual Work Report of the PAR Council, 2019. available at: https://bit.ly/38JDl08 (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

36   Sectorial Civil Society Organisations - the consultative structure for the programming of EU and bilateral donor assistance, available at: http://www.sekomehanizam.org (last accessed on 15 January 2021).

for the second formation of the IMPG, selection was based again on a streamlined, but more open, approach. Namely, in the preparations for the PAR Strategy AP for 2018-2020, an open application call was disseminated to interested CSOs to participate in its development, resulting in 12 CSOs being selected. Eventually, 11 out of these, became members of the re-established IMPG in October 2018, with two appointed representatives for each CSO (member and deputy).[37]

Findings indicate that the effectiveness of CSOs involvement in IMPG in Serbia has not yet matured. First, though the meetings generally allowed open contributions to discussions, they were not held regularly and there is a 13-month gap between the last two meetings held, with one in June 2019 and the following in July 2020. Second, focus group participants feel they have little to no impact, for instance, on agenda setting, reform plans, and financial matters. They believe that these sessions serve the purpose of approving already-made PAR decisions rather than making substantial contributions.[38] Consequently, there has been no improvement in the quality of civil society's participation since the previous PAR Monitor 2017/18.

Good practices: Online PAR Monitoring Tool in Serbia

In 2019, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in **Serbia** launched the online PAR monitoring tool that allows the tracking of the implementation of the PAR Strategy AP - https://monitoring.mduls.gov.rs/. This tool enables extensive filtering and navigation options for general statistics, individual strategy measures and indicators, responsible institutions, and types of financing. It also informs users about the status of individual AP activities and when they were implemented. Basic data visualisation is ensured as part of each PAR objective. Moreover, the same portal has a section on PAR coordination and monitoring structures in Serbia, with downloadable minutes from PAR Council and IMPG sessions. To remain as good practice, and to allow effective public insight, the responsible ministry needs to ensure regular and accurate updates.

Overall, two changes in indicator values are observed as compared to the baseline PAR Monitor. A positive one in the case of Serbia, where renewed IMPG membership was preceded by open competition for CSO members, and a negative one in Montenegro, where the role of CSOs has effectively diminished in the meantime.

Chart 2: Graph: Indicator values for SFPAR_P2&4_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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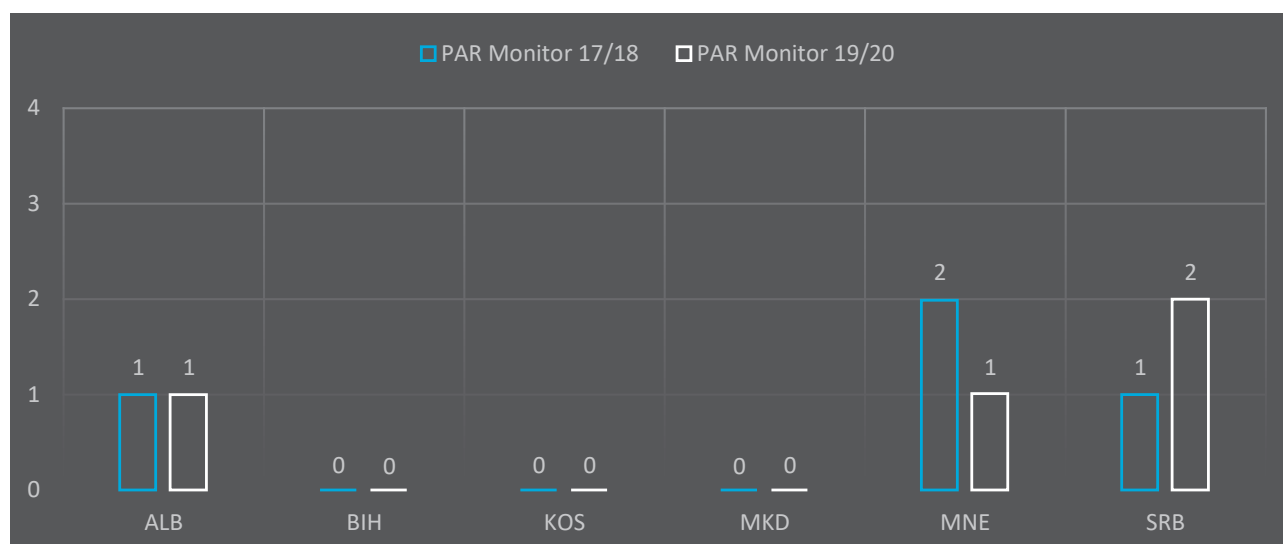
37   Decision on Establishing the Inter-Ministerial Project Group, 2018, available at: https://bit.ly/3oEJI5R (last accessed on 15 January 2021).
38   Focus group with IMPG members from civil society, held in Belgrade on 28 December 2020.

II.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR PAR AREA

WeBER monitors civil society involvement in both the development and monitoring of implementation of the strategic framework for PAR.

Mirroring the baseline PAR Monitor, findings suggest that all administrations involve CSOs and the public in the development of strategic PAR documents to a certain degree. Nevertheless, practices continue to vary greatly between (or within) administrations in terms of meeting basic consultation requirements. Early involvement in development processes is still an exception, with one case recorded each in North Macedonia (formalistic) and Serbia (substantial). At the same time, no universal standards are applied in terms of the openness of consultations on the strategic development of PAR, and practices of informing and reaching out to stakeholders are thus, for the most part, unpredictable or inconsistent in the region. Still, there are noteworthy cases of proactiveness in which responsible institutions invited CSOs with wide open invitations. On the other hand, administrations have been slightly more proactive in inviting business associations and organisations working on gender and disability issues to participate. In any case, consultation practices generally suffer from the insufficient and non-transparent provision of feedback. Based on evidence from this monitoring cycle, in half of the analysed cases no consultation reports were published, or no comments were gathered from the public. When consultation reports were publicly disclosed, consultees' comments were usually addressed individually (Kosovo and Serbia) or in groups (BIH). Overall, monitoring revealed slightly more weaknesses in consultation practices, and there is a need to standardise consultations on strategic frameworks as practices remain highly uneven, both across the region and across PAR strategic documents within administrations.

The participation of civil society in PAR monitoring and coordination is still a scattered rather than standard practice in the region, and no administration involves CSOs in both levels of PAR coordination, administrative and political. CSO involvement is formally envisaged at the political level in Albania (previously formally ensured for both levels upon invitation), and in Montenegro (as members of the PAR Council), whereas in Serbia full membership of CSOs is foreseen at the administrative level (in the Inter-ministerial Project Group - IMPG). Nevertheless, results from practice display ineffective CSO involvement. In Albania, there is no evidence of CSOs being invited to participate in any meetings, so their role remains on paper only. In Montenegro, the PAR Council has turned down some CSO requests for convening PAR Council sessions. Despite the renewed CSO membership in IMPG in Serbia preceded by an open call, meetings are infrequent while CSOs report that they have no impact on the agenda. Overall, the poor involvement of CSOs points out once again broader issues in the region such as underdeveloped policy monitoring and coordination structures and practices, disregard of civil society's potential to contribute to the implementation of PAR, and the limited functionality of existing PAR coordination and monitoring structures in general.

III. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND • COORDINATION

Policy development and coordination has major significance for citizens, businesses, and all the other members of a society, as policy that governments adopt and implement directly affects how individual rights are exercised in practice and how market actors operate. Since such policy also defines how state institutions interact and communicate with citizens, policy development and coordination procedures and standards consequently shape relations within a society.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that policymaking practices in a society are transparent, evidence-based, inclusive, and based on sound problem analysis, in which all members of society can inform themselves on their rights and obligations and participate in the co-creation of policy. Inclusive policymaking means that those affected by the adopted solutions are the first to be consulted and that policy responds to their needs. For this reason, transparency and inclusiveness should feature in all phases of the policy cycle, from policy creation to evaluation, so that governments can be held accountable for the results of chosen policy solutions.

III.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018

This state of play is largely based on the most recent progress reports of the European Commission regarding administrations in the WB.[39] Where needed, other sources have been used and cited individually.

Across the region, basic strategic frameworks for reforming policy development and coordination, as well as legislative development, are in place, with no major changes since PAR Monitor 2017/2018. In four administrations, reform goals and measures in this area are set out by general PAR strategies (Albania, BIH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro). Two administrations have dedicated strategic documents for policy development and coordination (Kosovo and Serbia). Regardless of the existence of separate strategies, this PAR area is targeted by their specific objectives and measures.

Table 8. Policy development and coordination reform documents in WB administrations

	DOCUMENT(S)	CONSULTATION REPORT
ALB	Cross-cutting PAR Strategy, Pillar A: Policymaking and the Quality of Legislation	2015-2020
BIH	Draft PAR Strategy, Section 5.1: Policy Development and Coordination	2018-2022
KOS	Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination (SIPPC) Better Regulation Strategy 2.0 (BRS)	2017-2021
MKD	PAR Strategy, Section 3.1: Policy Development and Coordination	2018-2022
MNE	PAR Strategy, Section 4.4: Policy Development and Coordination	2016-2020
SRB	Strategy of Regulatory Reform and Improvement of Policy Management System	2016-2020 (expired)[40]

This section focuses on those aspects of policy development and coordination that are most relevant for the public and civil society, i.e., those that have an outward facing character rather than being internal procedures of the government. Accordingly, these are the same elements and principles that the PAR Monitor methodology focuses on.

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39   All reports are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en (last accessed on 12 January 2021).

40   In addition, the PAR Strategy envisages measures and concrete activities for the improvement of the policy management system. The Serbian Government's Public Policy Secretariat publicised its starting work on the Draft policy programme for regulatory reform and the improvement of the policy management system for 2021-2027 in April 2020.

■ Decision-making and reporting by the government

Little change has been noted since the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor in terms of transparency and communication on decision-making processes at the level of government. Such processes are regulated in detail by the rules of procedures (RoP) of the region's executives, from the preparation of government sessions to their follow-up and communication of decisions from these sessions. Decisions taken at the government level are, therefore, normally publicly available. Some exceptions persist, such as non-publication of the Government conclusions in Serbia. Moreover, the level of transparency of the proceedings of government sessions varies across the region and is analysed thoroughly by the PAR Monitor (see Section III.3).

In all administrations, existing regulatory frameworks set up rules and procedures for reporting on central planning documents and define centre-of-government (CoG) institutions' responsibilities for managing overall policy development and coordination systems. Nevertheless, reporting practices across the region continue to lack focus on results and are still rather activity oriented. In some cases, work has progressed towards setting up IT systems for policy management (Albania and Serbia), which should help improve reporting approaches and practices. However, these systems are not yet operational. To complement its focus on the interest of the public in government reporting, WeBER further monitors the extent to which reporting on government performance is made public and citizen-friendly. The findings are presented in Section III.3 of this chapter.

■ Evidence-based policymaking

Policy development processes in the WB continue to suffer from insufficient use of evidence and data. Capacities for policy analysis are lacking, and the quality of evidence and data used is often inadequate. Although most administrations formally apply regulatory impact assessments (RIAs), their actual impacts on the quality of policy development are limited due to the substandard application of these tools. Albania marks progress since the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor in that RIAs have been more widely implemented there, and guidelines for their applications were adopted, although they remain to be fully institutionalised. Moreover, there are significant policy areas that are exempt from RIA requirements in Albania.[41]

Overall, RIA requirements are not consistently implemented across the region, while in some cases (BiH – Republika Srpska) the procedures on RIA for law-making have recently been simplified. In North Macedonia, until autumn 2019, RIAs were prepared for all laws the Government sent to parliament in its regular procedure, but then a number of exceptions were made in a short period of time with the adoption of some laws in an extraordinary procedure. Overall, the collection of administrative data and its use in producing RIAs and overall policymaking is largely substandard (Serbia), though some improvements have been noted (such as in North Macedonia). In Montenegro, while obligations to publish RIAs with draft laws in the public consultation process exist, they have been sporadically implemented and have not led to either more interest in consultations or better RIAs.

In Albania and Kosovo, explanatory memoranda are the main analytical documents supporting policy development, but the actual quality of these tools remains quite low. There are also instances where no centre-of government bodies (CoG) review the quality of explanatory memoranda (BIH and Kosovo). Furthermore, fiscal assessments and cost estimations of policy proposals still do not allow for credible information to guide policymaking. In most cases, information about the budgetary impacts of policy and law proposals is absent or limited (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). In BIH and Montenegro, despite the requirement for cost estimations of new policies at the state level, ministries produce them with uneven quality due to a lack of common guidelines, while in Kosovo, draft proposals contain funding only for some policy options.

■ Inclusiveness of policymaking

The whole region already had legal requirements for public consultations in legal drafting and policymaking in PAR Monitor 2017/2018. Though there has been progress in some cases regarding the quality of implementation of these requirements, certain weaknesses persist.

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41   Among others, these areas include national security, international relations, taxation and customs, and budgetary issues.

In Albania, trainings for line ministries on how to apply public consultations have been organised and operational instructions on public consultations drafted,[42] but overall, across the region, there is limited capacity to hold them properly. There have been efforts (for example in North Macedonia and Kosovo) to raise awareness about consultation web-portals and requirements for public consultation, but in other cases (such as Albania and BiH) such awareness is still assessed as low and use of portals by the public is limited. While in Serbia the legal framework sets out detailed requirements for the entire consultation process, in other cases (such as Albania), detailed instructions or methodologies are still missing. Quality assurance of the consultation processes is still a challenge across the region and, even where quality assurance has been established, it still focuses mainly on the process rather than substance of consultations. In 2019, North Macedonia was a case for concern as the percentage of legislation which did not go through public consultation before being sent to the Parliament increased threefold, to 62% as compared to only 20% in 2018.

III.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

In the Policy Development and Coordination area, WeBER monitoring is performed based on four SIGMA Principles:

Principle 5:   Government decisions are prepared in a transparent manner and based on the administration's professional judgement; legal conformity of the decisions is ensured;

Principle 6:   Government decisions are prepared in a transparent manner and based on the administration's professional judgement; legal conformity of the decisions is ensured;

Principle 10: The policy-making and legal-drafting process is evidence-based, and impact assessment is consistently used across ministries;

Principle 11: Policies and legislation are designed in an inclusive manner that enables the active participation of society and allows for co-ordination of different perspectives within the government,

In this edition of the PAR Monitor, five WeBER indicators are used for analysis in the Policy Development and Coordination area. As explained in the introductory chapter, unlike in the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/2018, SIGMA Principle 12 was not included in this monitoring cycle, and consequently an indicator on the accessibility of legislation was not measured.[43]

The first indicator measures the extent of openness and availability of information about governments' performance to the public, through analysis of the most comprehensive websites through which governments communicate their activities and publish reports. Written information published by governments relates to press releases and the online publishing of annual (or semi-annual) reports. The WeBER monitoring covers a period of two annual reporting cycles, except for press releases, which are assessed for a one-year period (due to the frequency of their publishing). Other aspects of government performance information analysed include understandability of published materials, usage of quantitative and qualitative information, presence of assessments/descriptions of concrete results, availability of gender-segregated and open-format data, and the online availability of reports on key whole-of-government planning documents.

The second indicator measures how CSOs perceives government planning, monitoring, and reporting on its work and objectives. To explore perceptions, a survey of CSOs in the WB was implemented in the period between the second half of June and the beginning of August 2020 using an online surveying platform.[44]

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42   See the 2019 PAR Strategy Monitoring Report, p. 21, available at: https://bit.ly/3tdCeCJ (last accessed on 12 March 2020).

43   SIGMA Principle 12: Legislation is consistent in structure, style, and language; legal drafting requirements are applied consistently across ministries; legislation is made publicly available. WeBER indicator used for monitoring this principle in 2017/2018: Perceptions of the availability and accessibility of legislation and related explanatory materials by civil society.

44   The survey of CSOs was administered through an anonymous, online questionnaire. The data collection method was CASI (computer-assisted self-interviewing).

A uniform questionnaire with 28 questions was used throughout the region, ensuring an even approach in survey implementation. It was disseminated in local languages through the existing networks and platforms of civil society organisations with large contact databases, and through centralised points of contact such as governmental offices in charge of cooperation with civil society. To ensure that the survey targeted as many organisations as possible in terms of types of organisations, geographical distribution, and activity areas, and hence be representative as much as possible, additional boosting was done where needed to increase overall responses. A focus group with CSOs served to complement survey findings with qualitative information.

The third indicator measures the transparency of decision-making by the government (in terms of the Council of Ministers), combining survey data on the perceptions of civil society with analysis of relevant government websites. Besides looking for published information on government decisions, the website analysis considers the completeness, citizen-friendliness, timeliness, and consistency of information. Monitoring was done for each government session in a six-month period - the last three months in the calendar year preceding the monitoring (2019), and first three months in the monitoring year (2020), except for the timeliness of publication, which is compared with all government sessions in the period of three months from the start of monitoring (roughly from the beginning of March until beginning of June 2020).

The fourth indicator measures whether government institutions invite civil society to prepare evidence-based policy documents, and whether evidence produced by CSOs is considered and used in policy development processes. Again, this measurement combines expert analysis of official documents and survey of civil society perceptions. Regarding document analysis, the frequency of references to CSOs' evidence-based findings is analysed for official policy and strategic documents, policy papers, and ex-ante and ex-post policy analyses and impact assessments in a sample of three policy areas.[45]

Finally, the fifth indicator, focusing on the quality of involvement of the public in policymaking through public consultations, was modified in this monitoring cycle. It includes not only perceptions of CSOs collected by online survey, but also additional qualitative data gathered through the analysis of a sample of public consultations as well as assessments of online governmental portals used for public consultations. More precisely, in this PAR Monitor this indicator was enhanced with the addition of qualitative document analysis of the scope and impact of public consultations on policy documents and legislation adopted in the second half of 2019, the availability and quality of reporting on public consultations, functionalities of the public consultation portals, and proactiveness of information provision by the responsible institutions.

III.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 5: REGULAR MONITORING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE ENABLES PUBLIC SCRUTINY AND SUPPORTS THE GOVERNMENT IN ACHIEVING ITS OBJECTIVES

With regards to Principle 5, the PAR Monitor methodology looks at the availability of information on government performance. More specifically, it measures the extent to which information about government performance is open and publicly available online and the extent to which CSOs consider that governments pursue and achieve their objectives. Thus, WeBER approaches this principle with two indicators. The first indicator, "**Public availability of information on government performance**" (Indicator PDC_P5_I1), consists of seven elements based on website and document analysis. The second indicator, "**Civil society perception of the Government's pursuit and achievement of its planned objectives**" (indicator PDC_P5_I2), is measured through six elements based on the civil society survey.

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45   Policy areas where a substantial number of CSOs actively work.

Table 9: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PDC_P5_I1 "Public availability of information on Government performance"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. The government regularly publishes written information about its activities	4	0	4	0	4	4	0
E2. The information issued by the government on its activities is written in an understandable way	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
E3. The information issued by the Government is sufficiently detailed, including both quantitative data and qualitative information and assessments	4	0	4	0	2	2	0
E4. The information issued by the Government includes assessments of the achievement of concrete results	4	0	2	0	2	0	0
E5. The information issued by the Government about its activities and results is available in open data format(s)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E6. The information issued by the Government about its activities and results contains gender segregated data	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
E7. Share of reports on Government strategies and plans which are available online	2	0	1	1	1	1	2
Total points	**20**	**0**	**15**	**1**	**11**	**7**	**2**
Indicator value 2019/2020[46]	0-5	**0**	**4**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**0**
Indicator value 2017/2018		0	3	3	0	1	0

The PAR Monitor assesses the regularity of publishing information on government performance by analysing two main practices: whether online press releases are issued on a weekly basis, and if at least annual reports on government performance are publicly available. Assessed cumulatively, for a period of two annual reporting cycles in the case of performance reports, and for a period of one year for press releases, the monitoring results indicate that most WB governments fail to properly disclose performance information to the public. One exception is the CoM of BiH.

For the most part, governments do regularly communicate with the public through press releases, mainly after each session, and in some cases more frequently, such as nearly daily in Kosovo and Montenegro. Generally, press releases about the activities of government are provided in citizen-friendly, understandable language. This means that they are usually devoid of unnecessary technical language and that their use of bureaucratic language is usually limited to references to documents and institutions.

When it comes to the availability of reports on the work and performance of governments, practices across the region are rather diverse. The CoM of BiH has maintained the positive trend of regularly reporting on its work since the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor. North Macedonia and Montenegro have improved reporting practices - the former to a greater extent, as in the previous monitoring cycle, reporting was not present at all (in fact, even the Government's work plans were not published). Serbia has also marked a small improvement in that at least one report on the Annual Work Plan of the Government (GAWP) could be found, yet this is not sufficient to improve the overall image of its reporting practices. The Albanian government continues to ignore its reporting responsibilities, a trend which was also evident in the previous monitoring cycle, while Kosovo marks a sharp drop in its score due to its failure to maintain what was previously positive reporting practice.

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46 Conversion of points: 0-4 points = 0; 5-8 points = 1; 9-11 points = 2; 12-14 points = 3; 15-17 points = 4; 18-20 points = 5.

> **Practices to avoid: Discontinuing previously found good practices**
>
> In **Kosovo**, a previously found good reporting practice was discontinued, as only a single report was published over two consecutive reporting cycles in breach of the Regulation nr.09/2011 on the Work of Government.

Those reports that do get published rarely include reader-friendly summaries, introductions or other elements which would make them more accessible for citizens. Efforts toward citizen friendliness are evident in reports made by the CoM of BiH, the one published report for Kosovo, as well as the North Macedonian government's reports, which are a novelty compared to the previous PAR Monitor. What stands out in those reports is an effort to communicate them directly to citizens through video presentations of government officials presenting achievements.

> **Good practices: Citizen-friendly approach to reporting**
>
> In **North Macedonia**, ministers have recorded videos in which they communicate results of the work in their portfolios to the public. Whereas this seems almost like a PR practice, it also does represent a citizen-friendly way of reporting to the public, which could be cautiously embraced by other administrations. What is important is for the statements in the videos to be supported by concrete evidence – both qualitative and quantitative – in written reports.

Table 10. Types of data on governments' performance found in published reports*

	ALB	**BIH**	**KOS****	**MKD**	**MNE**	**SRB****
QUANTITATIVE	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
QUALITATIVE	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
DATA ON RESULTS	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
OPEN FORMAT	X	X	X	X	X	X
GENDER DATA	X	X	X	X	X	X

* The green colour indicates improvements since the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/2018.

** Cases where information about available data is based on a single existing report for this monitoring cycle. This is why the element score in the table above is 0, whereas the table marks the presence of certain types of data.

Reports on governments' work also rarely display data on the achievement of concrete results against objectives or indicators. The reports of CoM in BIH do present information on specific results based on output-level performance indicators, without assessments of how objectives are performed against. The Kosovo report, a summary report which was published covering the Government's work from September 2017 to July 2019, does report more comprehensively on progress against objectives, though no work plans were available for the period of this monitoring. Nowhere in the region (with the exception of BIH) is the data presented in reports gender-sensitive, and there is no data in open formats, a same finding as in the previous monitoring cycle.

Finally, reports on the implementation of whole-of-government strategies, programmes, and plans are irregularly published online in WB administrations. Based on the selection of these documents in each administration, the table below demonstrates their online availability for the last full reporting year.

Table 11. Share of reports on whole-of-government strategies and plans available online for the last full reporting year (2018 and 2019 depending on reporting requirements)

	Strategies and plans of governments	Reports published	Share
ALB	National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI)	0	25%
	National Plan for European Integration (NPEI)	0	
	Medium Term Budget Programme (MBP)	1	
	Government Programme (GP)	0	
BIH	Economic Reform Programme (ERP)	1	50%
	Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP)	1	
	Medium-Term Work Programme of the CoM (MTGP)	0	
	Global Framework of Fiscal Balance and Policies (GFFBP)	0	
KOS	Economic Reform Programme (ERP)	1	60%
	National Plan for the Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (NPISAA)	1	
	National Development Strategy (NDS)	0	
	Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP)	0	
	Mid-term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)	1	
MKD	Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP)	1	60%
	Economic Reform Programme (ERP)	1	
	Fiscal Strategy (FS)	1	
	The National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (NPAA)	0	
	Plan 18 (Government EU Reform Plan)	0	
MNE	Programme of Economic Reforms (PER)	1	66.6%
	Government's Annual Working Programme (GAWP)	1	
	Medium-term Working Plan of the Government	1	
	Programme of Accession of Montenegro to the EU	1	
	Fiscal strategy (FS)	0	
	National Strategy of Sustainable Development	0	
SRB	Economic Reform Programme (ERP)	1	80%
	Government Annual Work Plan (GAWP)	1	
	National Program for the Adoption of Acquis of the EU (NPAA)	1	
	Action Plan for Implementation of Government Program (APIGP)	0	
	Fiscal Strategy/Mid-term Budgetary Framework (FS)	1	

In comparison to the baseline PAR Monitor, this monitoring cycle revealed two noteworthy changes regarding this indicator's values. In Kosovo, a sharp drop is owed to the fact that there was a gap in governmental reporting during the observed period, and only information for 2018 was reported in entirety. On the other hand, a notable increase in indicator value for North Macedonia came as the result of regular practices of reporting on performance by the Government, which was entirely absent in the last PAR Monitor cycle. Finally, BIH emerged at the top of the scale, with the CoM's reports being the most regular, citizen-friendly, and result-based in this cycle as compared to regional peers. Governments in Albania and Serbia remain at the very bottom of the scale due to the absence of publicly available reports in the former, and their irregular publishing in the latter.

Graph 3: Indicator values for PDC_P5_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
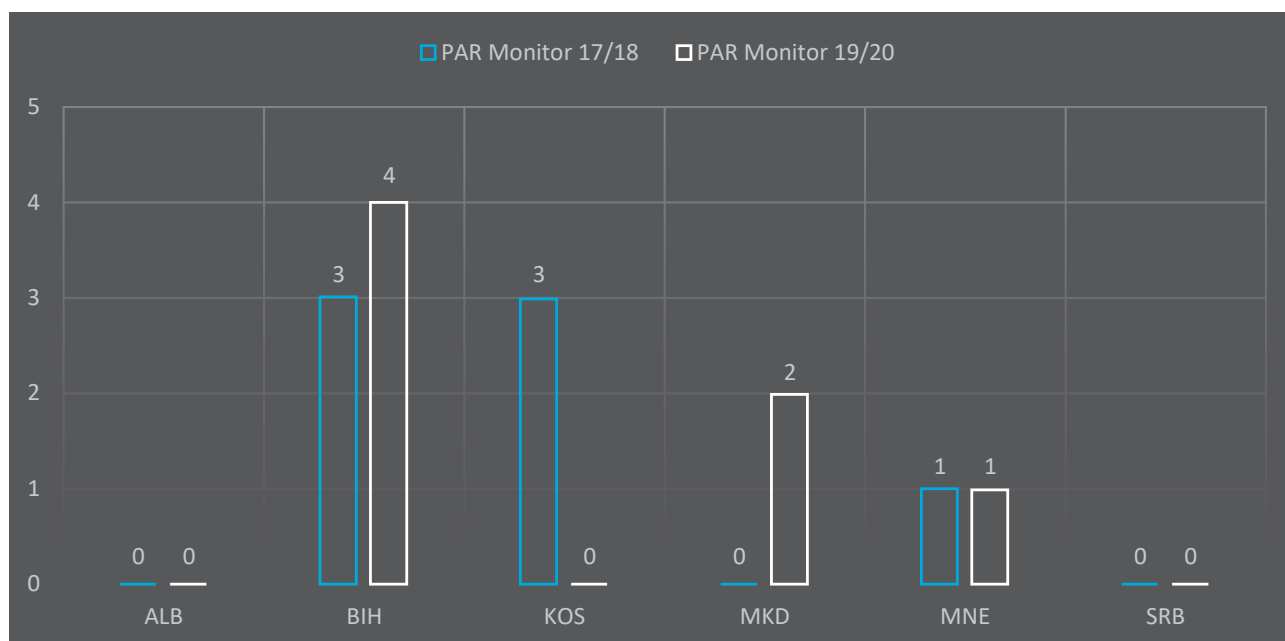
Table 12: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PDC_P5_I2 "Civil society perception of the Government's pursuit and achievement of its planned objectives"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. CSOs consider government's formal planning documents as relevant for the actual developments in the individual policy areas	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E2. CSOs consider that the Government regularly reports to the public on progress against the set objectives	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E3. CSOs consider that official strategies determine governments' or ministries' action in specific policy areas	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
E4. CSOs consider that the ministries regularly publish monitoring reports on their sectoral strategies	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E5. CSOs consider that the EU accession priorities are adequately integrated into the government's planning documents	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E6. CSOs consider that the Government's reports incorporate adequate updates on the progress against the set EU accession priorities	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**16**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Indicator value 2019/2020[47]	**0-5**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Indicator value 2017/2018		0	0	0	1	0	0

The overwhelming perception of CSOs across the region is that their governments do not pursue or achieve planned objectives. To the question of if they think that there is a direct connection between governments' workplans and actual developments in specific policy areas, 47% of surveyed CSOs across the region disagree. While North Macedonian and Montenegrin organisations are slightly more positive (with 28% of respondents in both cases agreeing with the statement), in the rest of the region only 10-13% express a positive opinion that

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47   Conversion of points: 0-3 points = 0; 4-5 points = 1; 6-7 points = 2; 8-10 points = 3; 11-13 points = 4; 14-16 points = 5.

their governments indeed do what they plan. Almost a third of respondents in the region are neutral, which suggests that CSOs do not have strong opinion or perhaps do not even follow the planning processes of the governments (in Montenegro, however, the proportion of neutral responses is much lower, standing at 17%).

Chart 1. CSO responses to the question "There is a direct connection between the workplan of the government and actual developments in specific policy areas" (%)
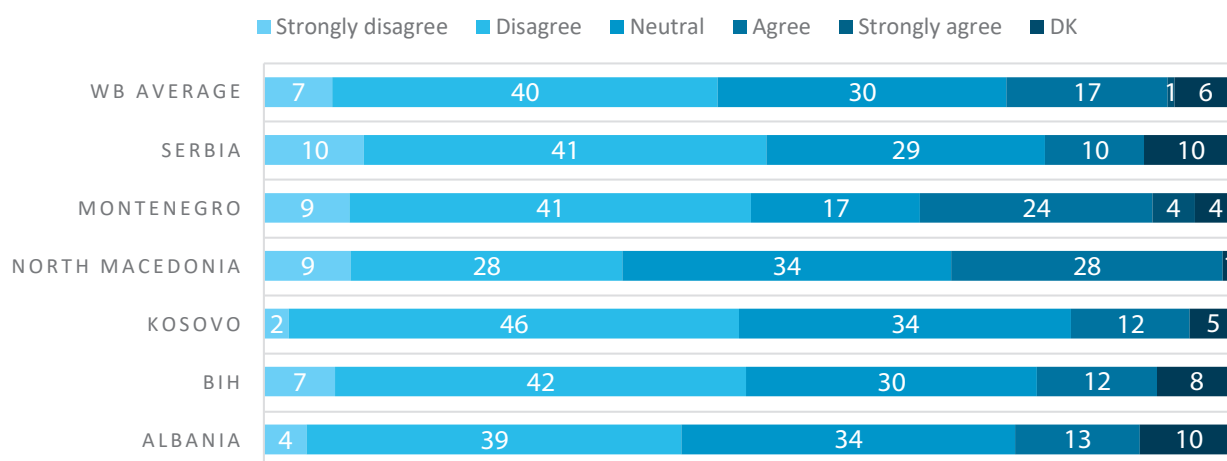
Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

CSOs are even more critical with regards to the regularity of governments' reporting to the public on the progress towards objectives set in their work plans, which repeats the trend in the previous PAR Monitor. As much as 58% disagree that their governments adequately report progress, while only 13% agree. As in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, organisations from Kosovo stand out with the most negative attitudes in this area (78% disagree), while North Macedonian CSOs are the most positive, with 30% disagreeing and 25% agreeing. The highest percentage of neutral responses, however, is precisely in North Macedonia, at 40%.

It should be reiterated that CSO perceptions do not always reflect the actual situation found through website and document analysis. For example, while in Kosovo at least one performance report was published in the analysed period, its CSOs emerged as the most critical, although in Albania, for example, no reports were published yet its civil society is slightly more positive on the issue. On the other hand, the more positive opinion of North Macedonian civil society as compared to the rest of the region clearly aligns with improved reporting practices in the relevant period. Similar results were found among North Macedonian CSOs in the previous monitoring cycle, since the survey then was rolled out after regime change there, when the new government initiated more transparent practices than the previous one.

Chart 2. CSO responses to the question "Governments regularly report to the public on their progress in the achievement of objectives set in their workplans" (%)

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	10	48	24	12	1	5
SERBIA	13	43	23	13	1	8
MONTENEGRO	11	52	22	9	4	2
NORTH MACEDONIA	4	26	40	25		4
KOSOVO	12	66	17			5
BIH	9	56	18	11	1	5
ALBANIA	13	46	24	10	1	6

Note*: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

CSOs do appear somewhat more recognisant of the relationship between official strategies and the actions of ministries and governments in various policy areas. At the regional level, a quarter of organisations agree that official strategies determine governments' or ministries' actions in specific policy areas, although a third are neutral and 41% disagree. While Serbian and Bosnian CSOs are the most critical, with half of respondents disagreeing, in Albania and Montenegro less than a third disagree.

Yet, over a half of respondents in the region disagree that ministries regularly publish monitoring reports on their sectoral strategies, 9 percentage points more than in the previous monitoring cycle. Only 12% of surveyed CSOs now recognise that such reports are published, down from 15% in the 2017/2018 cycle. The level of disagreement on this topic ranges from 37% in Albania to 66% in Kosovo, and the level of agreement is very low across the region, with the highest being in North Macedonia at 19%.

Chart 3. CSO responses to the question "Ministries regularly publish monitoring reports on their sectoral strategies" (%)
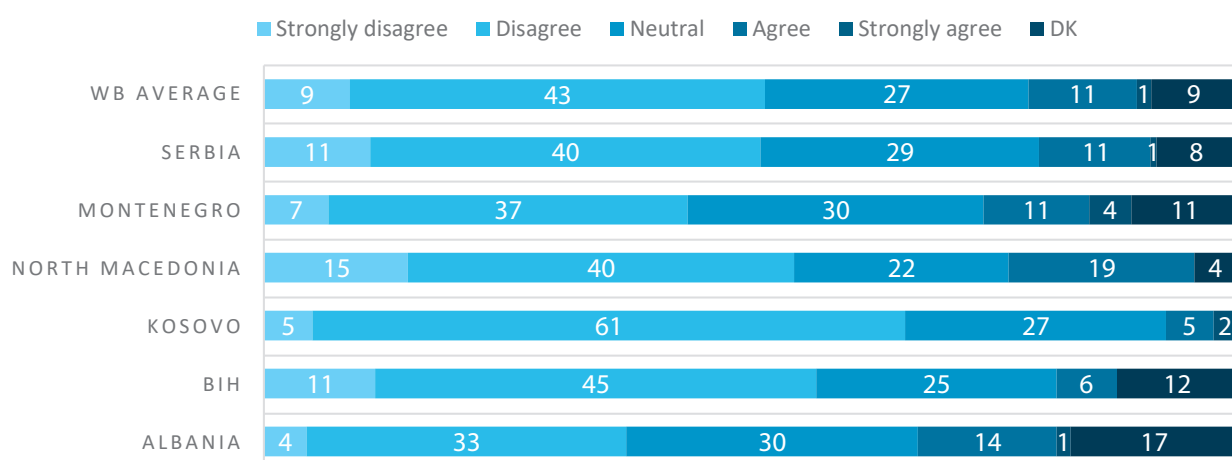
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	9	43	27	11	1	9
SERBIA	11	40	29	11	1	8
MONTENEGRO	7	37	30	11	4	11
NORTH MACEDONIA	15	40	22	19		4
KOSOVO	5	61	27		5	2
BIH	11	45	25	6		12
ALBANIA	4	33	30	14	1	17

Note*: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

The surveyed CSOs seem to recognise to a somewhat greater extent that in the policy areas in which CSOs work, government plans adequately reflect the priorities of the EU accession process. In other words, it can be said that CSOs recognise governments as more responsive to the needs of the EU accession process than as transparent towards their own publics (for example, by reporting to their publics regularly on their work).

The extent of agreement to this question has, however, dropped since the previous monitoring cycle, when it amounted to one quarter, and it now stands at one fifth of respondents. Disagreement has also, however, dropped by 5 percentage points and now stands at 37%. The CSOs that are the most negative on this question are those in BIH and Kosovo, while Albanian, Montenegrin, and North Macedonian organisations have the most positive views (with 26 to 28% in agreement). The finding that few CSOs agree that their governments' reports incorporate adequate updates on progress towards EU accession priorities (with only 15% agreeing and 46% disagreeing) is in line with the previously described negative perception of how regularly governments and ministries report on their work.

Chart 4. CSO responses to the question "In the policy area in which my organisation works, priorities of the EU accession process are adequately integrated into governments' plans" (%)

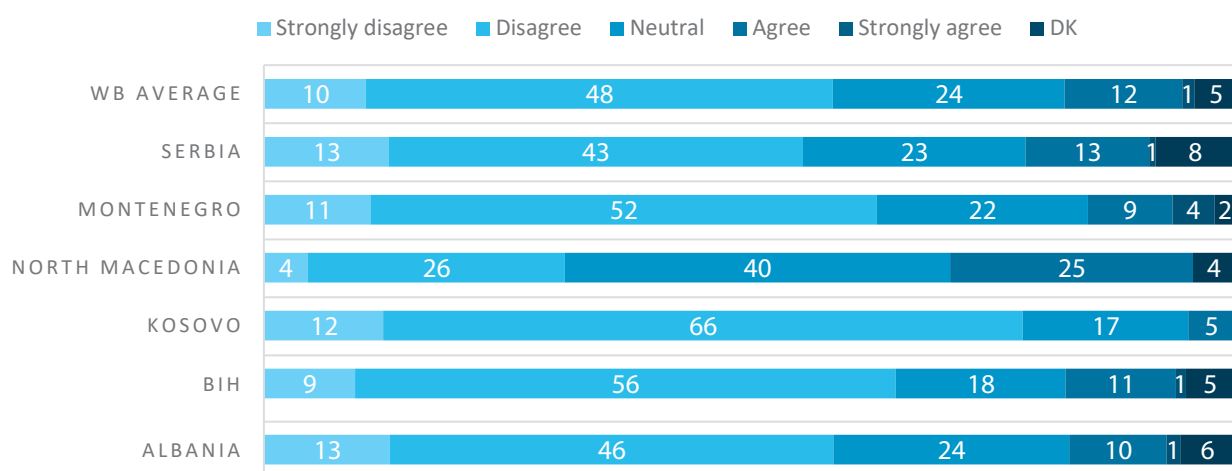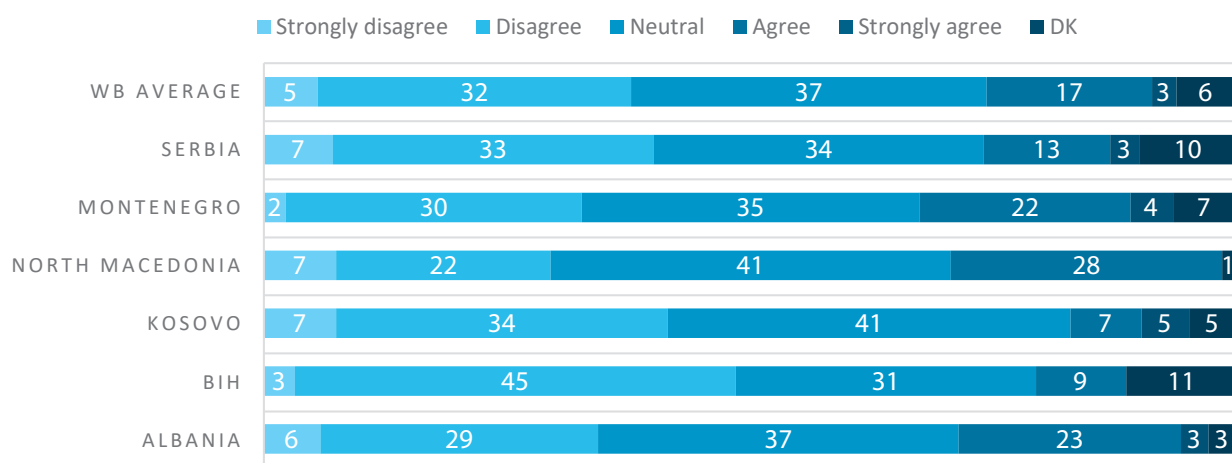
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Overall, the findings of the CSO survey for this indicator signal that organisations see their governments as insufficiently accountable to their citizens when planning and reporting on their policy priorities and results. CSOs are particularly negative when it comes to reporting to the public. As mentioned previously, CSOs seem to recognise that governments are more responsive to the priorities and needs of the EU accession process than to the rights of their own citizens to know what activities they are pursuing and results they are achieving.

It should be noted that in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, North Macedonian CSOs were a bit more positive on these questions, earning North Macedonia an indicator result of 1. This is a result of the fact that the survey was rolled out shortly after a change in government, when there was much enthusiasm surrounding the government practices that were being introduced. However, in the meantime, the North Macedonian CSOs seems to have been disappointed by their government's policy planning and reporting practices, which is why in this monitoring cycle the entire region has an indicator value of 0.

Graph 4: Indicator values for PDC_P5_I2 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
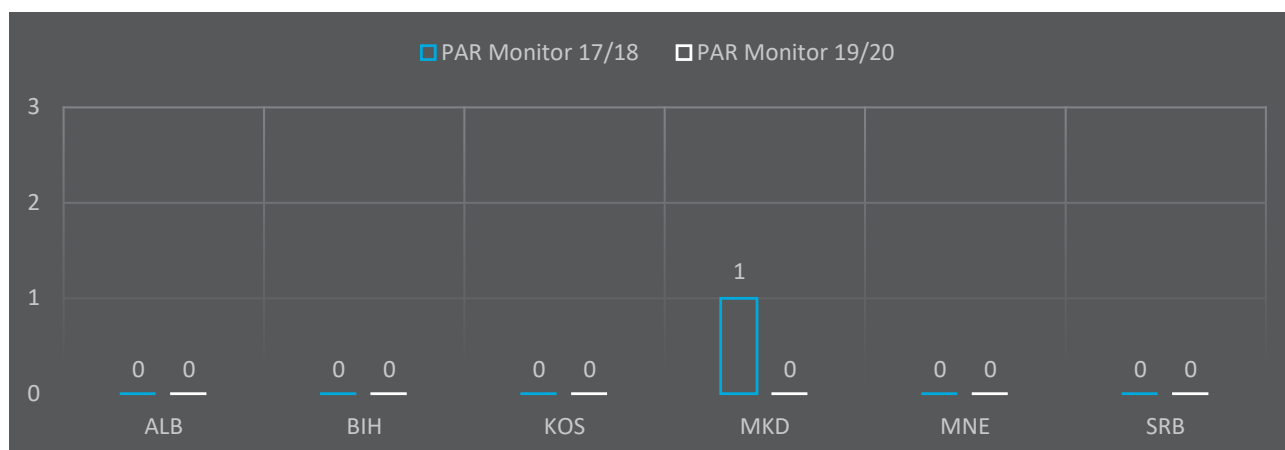
PRINCIPLE 6: GOVERNMENT DECISIONS ARE PREPARED IN A TRANSPARENT MANNER AND BASED ON THE ADMINISTRATIONS' PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT; LEGAL CONFORMITY OF THE DECISIONS IS ENSURED

The PAR Monitor addresses Principle 6 by focusing exclusively on the aspect of transparency in government decision-making. The monitoring approach entails measuring the extent to which government decision-making processes, as well their direct outputs (decisions), are transparent, along with the function of external communication. The "**Transparency of governments' decision-making**" (indicator PDC_P6_I1) indicator comprises five elements.

Table 13: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PDC_P6_I1 "Transparency of the Government's decision-making"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. CSOs consider government decision-making to be generally transparent	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E2. CSOs consider the exceptions to the rules of publishing Government's decisions to be appropriate	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E3. The Government makes publicly available the documents from its sessions	4	0	2	2	2	2	0
E4. The Government communicates its decisions in a citizen-friendly manner	4	2	4	4	4	2	2
E5. The Government publishes adopted documents in a timely manner	4	2	0	4	0	2	2
Total points	**16**	**4**	**6**	**10**	**6**	**6**	**4**
Indicator value 2019/2020[48]	0-5	**1**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**1**
Indicator value 2017/2018		1	2	3	2	2	1

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48   Conversion of points: 0-2 points = 0; 3-5 points = 1; 6-8 points = 2; 9-11 points = 3; 12-14 points = 4; 15-16 points = 5.

As in the 2017/2018 cycle, in this cycle as well only 13% of surveyed CSOs at the regional level agree to some extent that government decision-making processes are generally transparent. The proportion of regional disagreement is also identical to that of the previous cycle and stands at 53%. While North Macedonian civil society is slightly more approving and somewhat less disapproving than the rest of the region, it also has the largest share of organisations that are neutral on this issue, at 46%. Montenegrin CSOs are the most disapproving, with disagreement standing at 67%, followed closely by Serbian CSOs, 62% of whom disagree with this statement. The fact that a third of CSOs across the region are neutral on this question may suggest that many CSOs do not follow governmental decision-making closely in their work.

Chart 5. CSO responses to the question "In general, the government's decision-making process is transparent" (%)
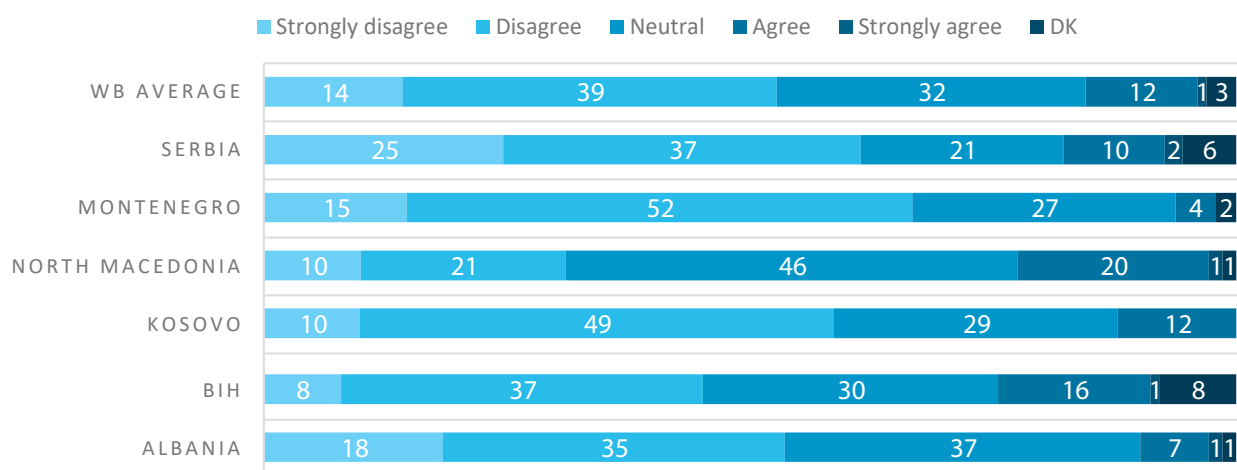
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Moreover, perceptions regarding whether exceptions to the obligation of publishing government decisions are appropriate are similarly negative and have not changed since the previous monitoring cycle, with 46% of surveyed CSOs disagreeing. The share of those agreeing is a mere 8%. Almost half of the respondents are either neutral (one third) or "do not know" (14%). Organisations from Kosovo are the most negative on this issue, with 53% disagreeing.

Chart 6. CSO responses to the question "Exceptions to the requirements to publish Government's decisions are appropriate" (%)
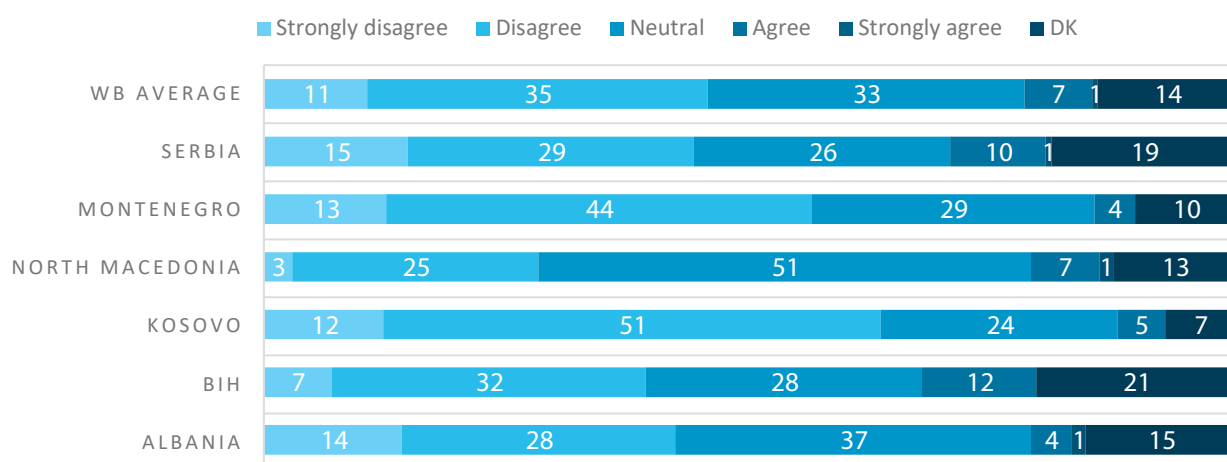

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 581 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

Analysis of the transparency of government sessions based on web research and freedom of information requests yields a different picture of the issue at stake, although variations in the region are considerable. In continuing the trend found in the first monitoring cycle, most governments still disclose information on their sessions through press releases and by publishing adopted documents and decisions.[49] Yet, agendas and minutes of sessions are still unavailable to the public in at least half of the administrations two years after the baseline monitoring. No government in the region publishes all four types of materials analysed under the indicator.

Table 14. Online availability of materials from WB governments' sessions (October 2019 to March 2020) – four types of materials analysed under Element 3 of the indicator PDC_P6_I1

	# OF GOV SESSIONS	# WITH AGENDAS PUBLISHED	# WITH MINUTES PUBLISHED	# WITH PRESS RELEASES PUBLISHED	# WITH ADOPTED DOCS PUBLISHED
ALB	49	0	0	7	37
BIH	28	12	21	25	3
KOS	26	0	0	24	25
MKD	50	50	42	50	0
MNE	27	27	0	26	27
SRB	56	0	0	43	46

Note: Compilation based on data collected through the monitoring process.

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49   According to the PAR Monitor methodology only adopted documents not formally labelled as confidential were considered for monitoring.

The Albanian government published the least amount of information on its sessions, though the adopted documents were made available to the public in most cases (75%). The minutes of the Albanian CoM's meetings are officially marked as confidential. In Serbia on the other hand, press releases and documents/decisions are published for a majority of sessions (around 76% of them), but neither agendas nor minutes are published, and the publication of adopted decisions and acts is not systematic. In Serbia, the RoP of the Government explicitly state that government conclusions – acts which are used to adopt many important government decisions – are by default not published, but only when in their texts it is explicitly stated. This finding reiterates a problem that was found in the previous PAR Monitor and stated in several EU progress reports.[50] In Kosovo, agendas and minutes are not published either. Nevertheless, regular press releases list all decisions made at cabinet sessions.

BIH and North Macedonia continue, as in the previous cycle, to publish the majority of the observed types of information from government sessions, including agendas and minutes elaborating decisions made. Nevertheless, in BIH the publication of agendas and minutes is not regular, as can be seen in the table above. Moreover, both administrations fail to publish adopted documents/decisions in a manner which would make them accessible to the public. In BIH, several types of decisions/acts adopted at CoM's meetings are not published on its website, with only those that are proposed as well as adopted by the CoM of BiH published. It is the responsibility of institutions that propose other acts to publish them on their websites, but the CoM does not provide links to such websites, where adopted acts can be found. As for North Macedonia, adopted documents and decisions are published only in the Official Gazette and not on the Government's website. Considering that access to this gazette is not free, requiring a paid subscription, it results that North Macedonia fails to fulfil the requirement of freely publishing government decisions.

The Montenegrin government has the most comprehensive approach towards the proactive publishing of materials related to its sessions, based on a decision dating from 2011. It publishes agendas ahead of sessions, as well as final agendas and all adopted acts, along with press releases following sessions. Yet, since the mentioned decision does not require the publishing of minutes, they are not published. As noted in the baseline PAR Monitor, in Montenegro there is still a problem with the discussion of issues classified as confidential. As such items may not appear in the Government agendas, the public remains unaware that certain items are even discussed, despite the diversity of such potential exceptions.

This indicator further examines how citizen-friendly press releases or articles published after government sessions are. It analyses whether they are written in clear and non-bureaucratic language to explain decisions made. Moreover, the indicator looks at whether these materials are easily accessible, meaning that they should be available no more than three clicks from the homepage of the governments' websites. In Albania, press releases are scarcely published after government sessions, although decisions made at the sessions are easily accessible. In all other observed cases, press releases are easy to access within three clicks, and are written in a simplified manner so that that citizens can understand government decisions. Still, the language use in press releases in the region is, in many cases, only partially simplified, with frequent bureaucratic and technical jargon (Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia), and without explanations of decisions that would make them more comprehensible to ordinary citizens. North Macedonia presents a good example of producing press releases with explanations of the context in which particular decisions are made.

Finally, the indicator looks at whether decisions adopted by governments are made publicly available on official government websites in a timely manner (meaning a maximum of one week after the session at which they were adopted).[51] Unlike in the previous monitoring cycle, when in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro all adopted decisions and documents were made available shortly after government sessions, in this monitoring cycle there is some deterioration of the situation, even though overall indicator scores are not affected. In this cycle, only Kosovo was found to publish cabinet decisions regularly, whereas in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia this was the case most of the time (for over 60% sessions but not in all cases in which decisions were taken). For BIH and North Macedonia, this aspect could not be analysed because adopted documents were

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50   Dragana Bajić, Miloš Đinđić, "National PAR Monitor for Serbia 2017/2018", 2018, p. 50, available at: https://bit.ly/3upsHJb. EU progress reports available at: https://bit.ly/3wupg63.

51   The researchers directly monitored the publication of decisions for all government sessions in the three-month period from the beginning of March 2020.

not published on government websites, the problem in the latter being that publication is done only in the Official Gazette, which requires paid subscriptions.

The results for this indicator are almost identical to those of the previous monitoring cycle, and indicator values have not changed. The two elements which are based on CSO perceptions have scored zero points in the region. In fact, CSOs are even more critical of the limited transparency of government decision-making than of the previously analysed issues. These perceptions, presented in Elements 1 and 2, do not fully correspond with practices that researchers found through document analysis and that are reflected in Elements 3 through 5. Nevertheless, despite some changes, governments in the region did not improve the transparency of decision-making enough to affect indicator values for the better.

Graph 5: Indicator values for PDC_P6_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
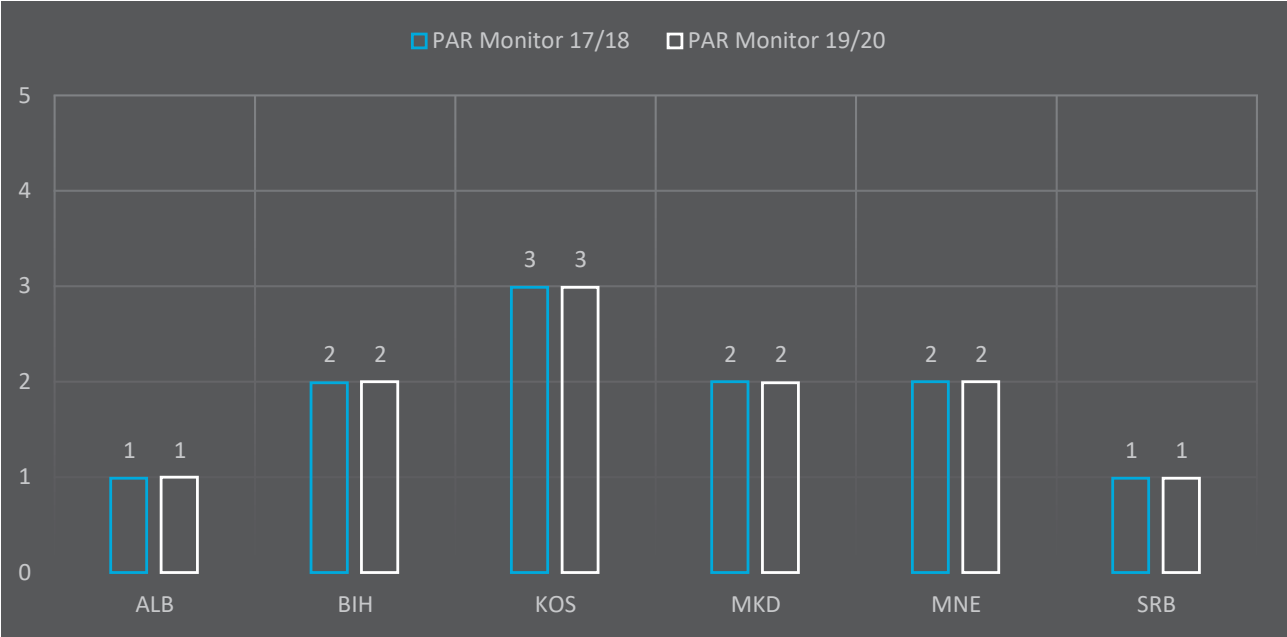
PRINCIPLE 10: THE POLICY-MAKING AND LEGAL-DRAFTING PROCESS IS EVIDENCE-BASED, AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT IS CONSISTENTLY USED ACROSS MINISTRIES

In its approach to Principle 10, the PAR Monitor methodology focuses on the question of how policy research and advice generated outside of administrations, within the policy research community, is used by governments to support evidence-based policymaking. This indicator titled "**Use of evidence created by think tanks, independent institutes, and other CSOs in policy development**" (indicator PDC_P10_I1) consists of eight elements.

Table 15: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PDC_P10_I1 "Use of evidence created by think tanks, independent institutes, and other CSOs in policy development"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Frequency of referencing of evidence-based findings produced by CSOs in the adopted government policy documents	4	4	2	2	2	2	4
E2. Frequency of referencing of evidence-based findings produced by CSOs in policy papers and ex ante impact assessments	4	2	0	2	0	0	2
E3. Share of evidence-based findings produced by wide range of CSOs, such as think tanks, independent institutes, locally-based organisations, referenced in ex post policy analyses and assessments of government institutions	2	1	0	0	0	0	2
E4. Relevant ministries or other government institutions invite or commission wide range of CSOs, such as think tanks, independent institutes, locally-based organisations, to prepare policy studies, papers or impact assessments for specific policy problems or proposals.	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
E5. Representatives of relevant ministries participate in policy dialogue (discussions, round tables, closed door meetings, etc.) pertaining to specific policy research products.	2	2	1	2	1	1	1
E6. Representatives of wide range of CSOs, such as think tanks, independent institutes, locally-based organisations are invited to participate in working groups/ task forces for drafting policy or legislative proposals when they have specific proposals and recommendations based on evidence.	4	0	0	2	2	2	0
E7. Relevant ministries in general provide feedback on the evidence-based proposals and recommendations of the wide range of CSOs, such as think tanks, independent institutes, locally-based organisations which have been accepted or rejected, justifying either action.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E8. Ministries accept CSOs' policy proposals in the work of working groups for developing policies and legislation	4	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total points	**24**	**11**	**2**	**11**	**6**	**5**	**9**
Indicator value 2019/2020[52]	**0-5**	**2**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Indicator value 2017/2018		1	0	3	0	0	1

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52   Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-8 points = 1; 9-12 points = 2; 13-16 points = 3; 17-19 points = 4; 20-24 points = 5.

The adopted government policy documents analysed under this indicator include currently implemented strategies, plans, programmes, and other types of documents which can reference information directly. In each administration, policy documents were analysed in three policy areas.[53] Table 16 details the number of such documents per policy area and the number of references identified.

Table 16. Frequency of references to evidence-based findings produced by CSOs in adopted government policy documents in three selected policy areas

	POLICY AREA	# OF ANALYSED POLICY DOCUMENTS	PRESENCE OF REFERENCES	% OF ALL POLICY DOCUMENTS WITH REFERENCES
ALB	Anti-discrimination	5	YES	69%
	Social protection	6	YES	
	Anti-corruption	2	NO	
BIH	Anti-corruption	1	NO	37,5%
	Anti-discrimination	5	YES	
	Environment	2	YES	
KOS	Anti-corruption	1	YES	15%
	Public administration	6	NO	
	Economic development	6	YES	
MKD	Anti-discrimination	4	YES	32%
	Social welfare	8	YES	
	Environment	7	YES	
MNE	Anti-corruption	4	YES	28%
	Anti-discrimination	6	YES	
	Environment	8	YES	
SRB	Anti-discrimination	6	YES	61%
	Environment	10	YES	
	Media and culture	2	YES	

The use of CSO findings is significantly lower in the development of ex-ante or ex-post policy papers, analysis, and impact assessments than in the observed policy documents, based on the analysis within the same three policy areas.[54] Compared to the results of the previous monitoring exercise, the situation has somewhat improved in Albania and Serbia. While RIAs, concept papers, and explanatory memoranda for legislation were identified in almost all cases (except for BIH), only in Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia were such documents found to contain CSO-produced references. In Serbia, however, this occurrence is quite rare, with only 6% of the 99 identified documents satisfying this criterion. Ex-post analyses were identified in the same three administrations, but only in Albania and Serbia do they occasionally quote CSO evidence.

The remaining elements in this indicator are based on the opinions of CSOs concerning the extent and manner in which government institutions use their inputs and evidence in policymaking processes. When asked if they invite their organisations to prepare or submit policy papers, studies, or impact assessments in the development of policy proposals, 38% of CSOs across the region confirm that this is the case, which is almost identical to the results of the previous monitoring cycle, where it was 37%. The highest agreement with the statement was found in Albania (61%), followed by Kosovo (51%), whereas it was lowest in the EU accession "frontrunners" Montenegro and Serbia (21% and 24% respectively).

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53   Criteria were used for the selection of policy areas where a substantial number of CSOs actively work and conduct research and analyses.

54   The policy papers and impact assessment documents included in this research are ex-ante regulatory impact assessments (RIAs), other types of ex-ante impact assessments, policy concept documents, policy papers (green papers and white papers), as well as annotations/justifications of legislation and policy documents.

Chart 7. CSO responses to the question "When addressing policy problems or developing policy proposals, government institutions invite my organisation to prepare or submit policy papers, studies or impact assessments" (%)
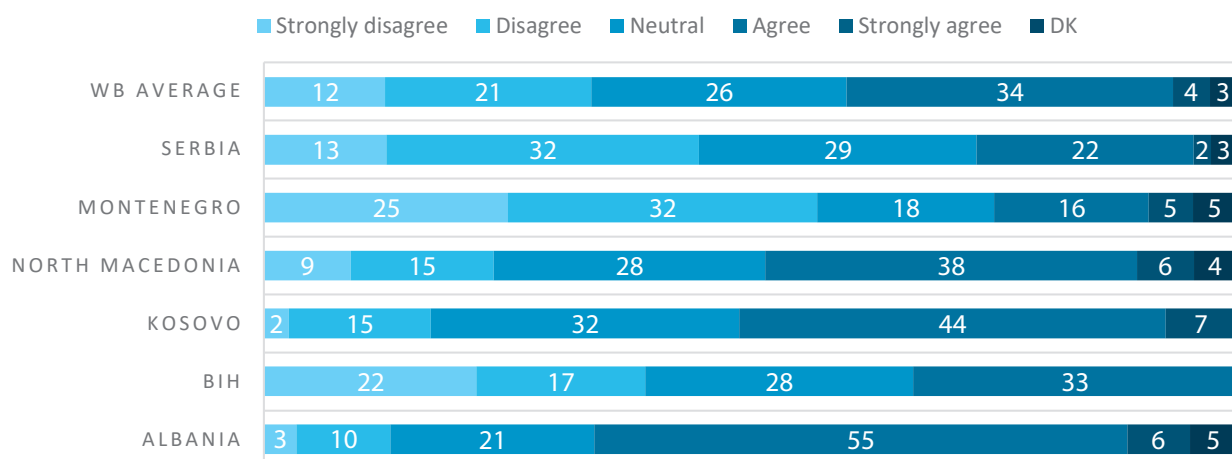
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	12	21	26	34	4	3
SERBIA	13	32	29	22	2	3
MONTENEGRO	25	32	18	16	5	5
NORTH MACEDONIA	9	15	28	38	6	4
KOSOVO	2	15	32	44		7
BIH	22	17	28	33		
ALBANIA	3	10	21	55	6	5

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 396 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

When asked how frequently representatives of relevant government institutions participate in events organised to promote policy products developed by civil society when invited, respondents have quite positive views. At the regional level, 52% of surveyed CSOs state that this is the case often or always, whereas only 22% report that this is the case rarely or never. In Kosovo, 78% respond to this question with "always" and "often", whereas Serbian CSOs are on the other end of the spectrum, with only 31% saying so. These trends follow those found in the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor.

Chart 8. CSO responses to the question "When invited by my organisation, representatives of relevant government institutions participate in events (such as roundtables, discussions, and others) organised to promote our policy products (such as reports, policy briefs, and others)" (%)
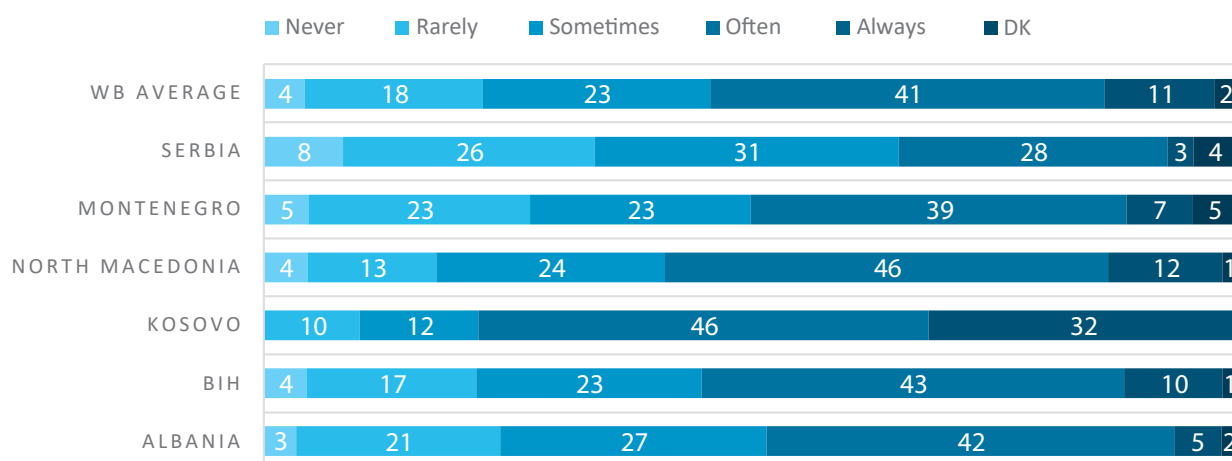
Legend: ■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always ■ DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	4	18	23	41	11	2
SERBIA	8	26	31	28	3	4
MONTENEGRO	5	23	23	39	7	5
NORTH MACEDONIA	4	13	24	46	12	1
KOSOVO	10	12	46	32		
BIH	4	17	23	43	10	1
ALBANIA	3	21	27	42	5	2

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 396 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

On the question of how often ministries invite CSOs to participate in working groups/task forces for drafting policy or legislative proposals in the past two years, CSO perceptions are somewhat more negative. It should nevertheless be noted that the response "sometimes" could also be considered as a positive response for this particular question, although for the calculation of points only the "always" and "often" responses applied. At the level of the WB, 30% of the surveyed CSOs responded with "often" and "always or almost always" to this statement, but if the "sometimes" responses are added, this share goes up to 58%. Serbian CSOs are the most negative on this issue, with 61% stating that this never or rarely happens. On the other hand, 56% of Kosovo CSOs report that ministries always or often invite them to take part in working groups, and when the "sometimes" answers are added, it results that an overwhelming 85% of surveyed CSOs in Kosovo confirm that this is an occasional or frequent practice. It should in any case be noted that these perceptions have slightly changed since the previous monitoring cycle, when 34% replied with "always" or "often" in the region and another 23% replied with "sometimes", totalling 57% of responses confirming some regularity of this practice. Bosnian and Montenegrin CSOs, which were as negative on this subject as Serbian ones in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, now hold somewhat more positive views.

Chart 9. CSO responses to the question "Relevant ministries invite my organisation to participate in working groups/task forces for drafting policy or legislative proposals when we have specific evidence-based proposals and recommendations" (%)
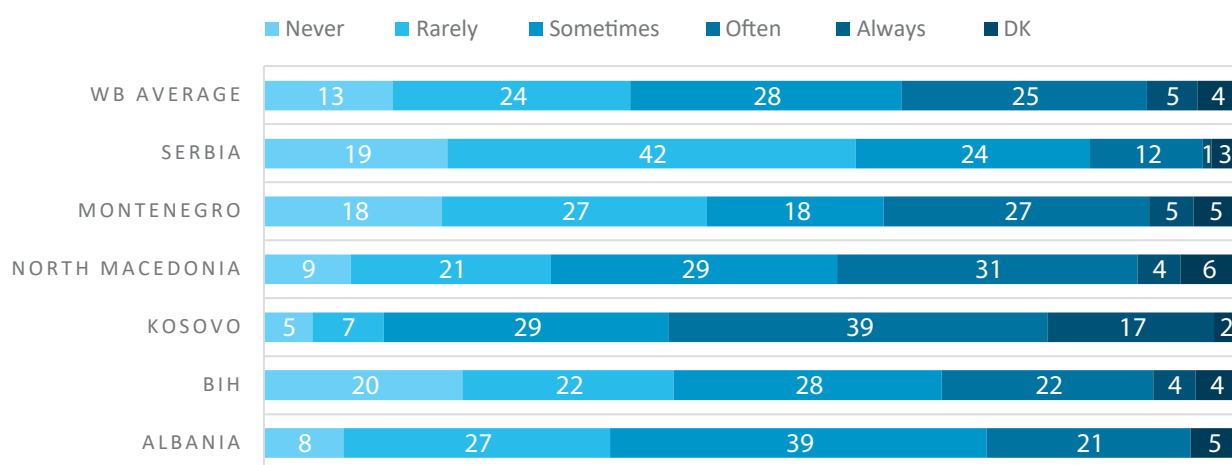
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 396 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

The survey also inquired how frequently ministries provide reasons for the acceptance or rejection of CSOs' proposals and recommendations. As in the previous monitoring exercise, the majority of respondents (57% at the regional level) state that this is never or rarely the case, whereas only 14% claim this to be the case always or often. CSOs in Serbia are by far the most negative on this question, with 73% denying that this is the case. Albanian CSOs follow with 61% replying "never" or "rarely".

Chart 10. CSO responses to the question "Relevant ministries provide feedback explaining the reasons for either the acceptance or rejection of evidence-based proposals and recommendations coming from my organisation during participation in working groups" (%)
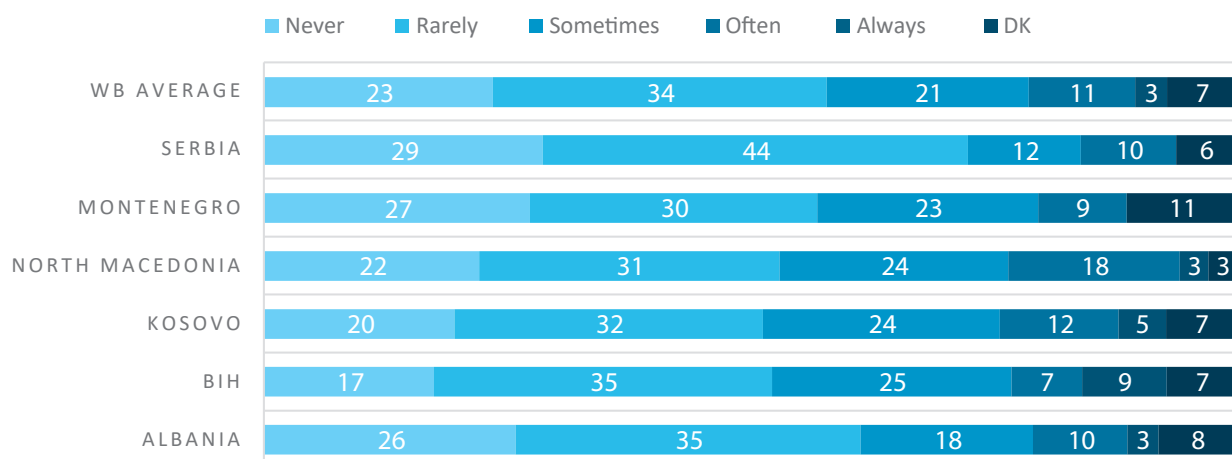
Legend: Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	23	34	21	11	3	7
SERBIA	29	44	12	10		6
MONTENEGRO	27	30	23	9		11
NORTH MACEDONIA	22	31	24	18	3	3
KOSOVO	20	32	24	12	5	7
BIH	17	35	25	7	9	7
ALBANIA	26	35	18	10	3	8

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 396 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Finally, CSOs do recognise that relevant ministries occasionally accept the policy proposals that they produce and present to them, although only 1 in 5 state this to be the case always or often (a 4 percentage point drop compared to the results of the baseline monitoring). Over a third recognise this to happen sometimes, while 40% say that this is never or rarely the case.

Chart 11. CSO responses to the question "Relevant ministries generally consider the policy proposals made by my organisation" (%)
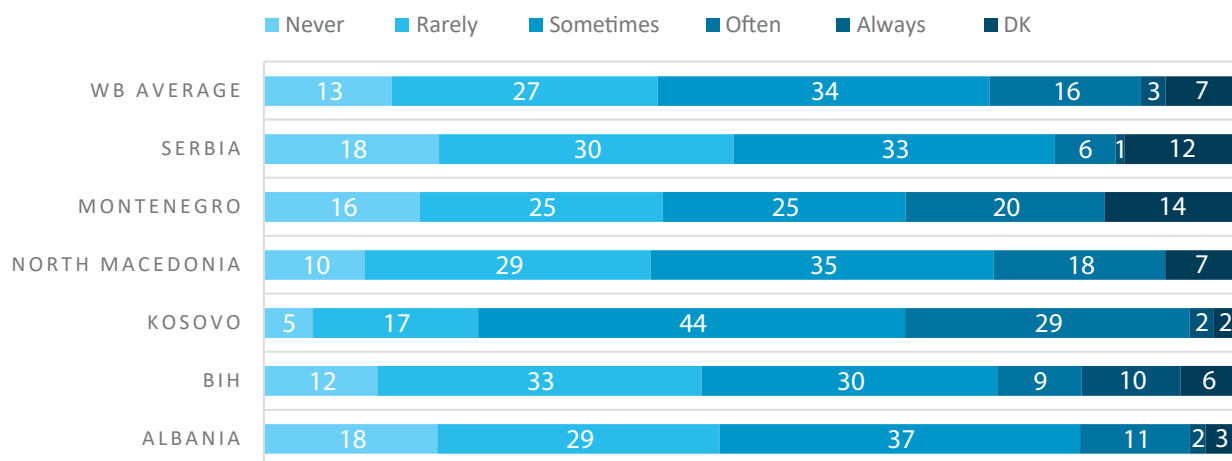
Legend: Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	13	27	34	16	3	7
SERBIA	18	30	33	6	1	12
MONTENEGRO	16	25	25	20		14
NORTH MACEDONIA	10	29	35	18		7
KOSOVO	5	17	44	29	2	2
BIH	12	33	30	9	10	6
ALBANIA	18	29	37	11	2	3

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 396 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Overall, civil society in the region tends to be more positive on various aspects of their contribution to the evidence-based policy development than on other examined aspects of policy planning and policymaking. The contrast is particularly stark compared to perceptions regarding government reporting practices and the transparency of government decision-making processes.

Nevertheless, since the baseline PAR Monitor, the overall situation in the region regarding the use of evidence-based findings produced by CSOs to support official policy documents and various policy papers has only slightly improved. As in the previous cycle, referencing is more common in cases of officially adopted policy and strategic documents than it is for concept or policy papers. Moreover, as ex-post assessments and evaluations are still rarely done in the region, references to the work of CSOs are rare in this type of documents, but to a great extent this is the case because of the very lack of such documents.

Indicator value changes can be observed in four cases. In Albania, occasional referencing to CSO findings in both ex-ante and ex-post policy analyses and assessments (unlike in the baseline PAR Monitor), together with civil society's slightly more positive perceptions, brought about a higher indicator value. In Serbia, 3 out of 4 examined ex-post policy analyses had at least one reference to externally produced research, a notable change compared with baseline monitoring, where no such analyses were found. In North Macedonia, occasional referencing to externally produced research in adopted policy documents brought improvements in this monitoring cycle. Finally, slightly more reserved opinions from civil society led to a lower indicator score for Kosovo, but nevertheless CSOs in Kosovo remain among the most positive in the region when it comes to the use of evidence in policymaking.

Graph 7: Indicator values for PDC_P10_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
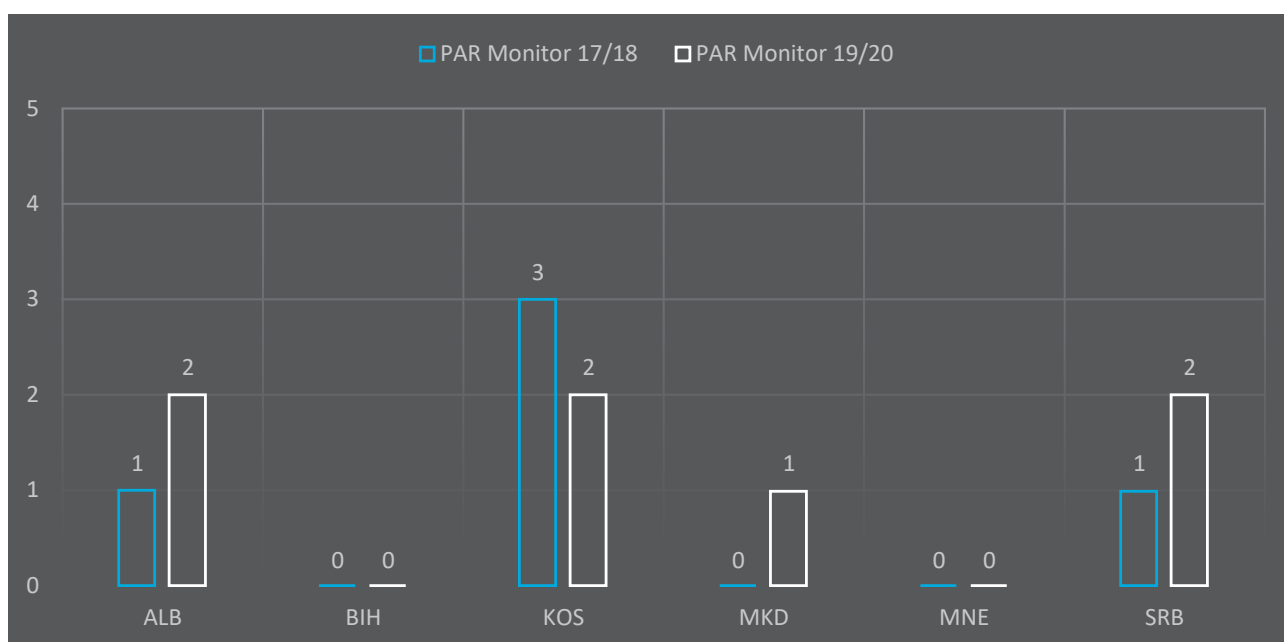
PRINCIPLE 11: POLICIES AND LEGISLATION ARE DESIGNED IN AN INCLUSIVE MANNER THAT ENABLES THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF SOCIETY AND ALLOWS FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT

The indicator measuring Principle 11 in the PAR Monitoring methodology has been revised to ensure a balance between an analysis of practices based on administrative documents and evidence on the one hand, and civil society perceptions on the other. To the previously existing 10 perception-based elements an additional 10 document-based elements have been added. One element was removed due to its duplication (Elements 2 and 6 in the previous monitoring cycle). Therefore, this indicator cannot be compared with the previous monitoring cycle.

In the revised indicator, WeBER still retains its focus on external consultation processes, but the part of Principle 11 dealing with internal (intra-governmental or cross-ministerial) coordination and consultation processes is left out, as it does not have a direct, citizen-facing purpose. The indicator "Inclusiveness and openness of policymaking" (indicator PDC_P11_I1), consists of 19 elements.

Table 17: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PDC_P11_I1 "Inclusiveness and openness of policymaking"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Scope of public consultations on policy documents in central administration	4	0	4	0	4	0	2
E2. Scope of public consultations on legislation in central administration	4	2	4	4	4	2	0
E3. Availability of reporting on public consultations on policy documents by central administration	4	0	2	0	0	0	2
E4. Availability of reporting on public consultations on legislation by central administration	4	0	4	4	0	4	2
E5. Basic functionality of a national public consultation portal	4	0	2	2	2	0	0
E6. Advanced functionality of a national public consultation portal	2	1	1	1	2	0	0
E7. Proactiveness of informing on public consultations	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
E8. Embeddedness of early public consultations in practice	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E9. Quality of reporting on public consultations	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
E10. Impact of public consultation results on policy making	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
E11. CSOs consider formal consultation procedures create preconditions for effective inclusion of the public in the policy-making process	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
E12. CSOs consider formal consultation procedures are applied consistently	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
E13. CSOs consider that they are consulted at the early phases of the policy process	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E14. CSOs consider consultees are timely provided with information on the content of legislative or policy proposals	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E15. CSOs consider consultees are provided with adequate information on the content of legislative or policy proposals	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E16. CSOs consider sponsoring ministries take actions to ensure that diversity of interests is represented in the consultation processes (women's groups, minority rights groups, trade unions, employers' associations, etc.)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E17. CSOs consider ministries (sponsors of policy and legislative proposals) provide written feedback on consultees' inputs/comments	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E18. CSOs consider ministries (sponsors of policy and legislative proposals) accept consultees' inputs/comments	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
E19. CSOs consider ministries (sponsors of policy and legislative proposals) hold constructive discussions on how the consultees' views have shaped and influenced policy and final decision of Gov.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**50**	**4**	**18**	**16**	**13**	**12**	**6**
Indicator value 2019/2020[55]	**0-5**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**
Indicator value 2017/2018[56]		0	0	1	0	0	0

55 Conversion of points: 0-9 points = 0; 10-17 points = 1; 18-25 points = 2; 26-33 points = 3; 34-41 points = 4; 42-50 points = 5.

56 The indicator values are not comparable for the two monitoring cycles due to indicator revision. In the baseline PAR Monitor 2017/2018, conversion of points was the following for a total of 30 points: 0-6 points = 0; 7-10 points = 1; 11-15 points = 2; 16-20 points = 3; 21-24 points = 4; 25-30 points = 5.

Starting from a basic analysis of the share of strategies and other policy documents adopted by governments that underwent some form of consultation in the last six months of the year preceding measurement (from July to December 2019), the regional picture is quite mixed. In BIH and North Macedonia very few official policy documents were adopted (three and one respectively), but they all underwent consultations before being approved. In Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia a greater number of such documents were adopted, but they did not all undergo consultations: in Albania and Montenegro less than 50% did. Kosovo is a specific case in that the greater part of the observed period was covered by a technical government which largely did not adopt strategies and other policy documents. The one strategy that was adopted was not consulted with the public.

The same analysis of proposals of laws adopted by the governments in the region yields a better picture in all administrations except for the two EU accession frontrunners, Montenegro and Serbia. While in BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia all government-adopted bills were previously consulted with the public, in Albania this was the case for 64%. On the other hand, in Montenegro and Serbia below 50% of law proposals underwent consultations.

Early consultations are a practically non-existent practice across the region. In most cases no early consultations are held, while in Montenegro and Serbia only one such occurrence was identified in each. The publication of reports on public consultations for policy documents is a rare practice in the region as well. Only the state-level institutions of BIH published several such reports, though not in all cases in which consultations were held.

The situation is somewhat better when it comes to reporting on consultations for law proposals. Namely, in BIH, Kosovo, and Montenegro reports were published for all or almost all proposals that underwent consultations. In Serbia, for 72% reports on public debates were published, whereas in Albania and North Macedonia no such reports were published. The quality of those reports that do exist is generally poor. In few cases (partially in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia) do they contain all the comments and proposals submitted during public consultation process listed individually without aggregated inputs. The same goes for the criterion of if reports contain clear information on feedback for each individual proposal, i.e., if proposals are accepted, rejected, or partially accepted. Justifications of the acceptance or rejection of comments are sometimes included in cases of published consultation reports in these three administrations, being most frequent in Montenegro. In BIH, although documents are published for consultation, they do not receive comments from the public, due to which this criterion was not satisfied.

The actual impact of public consultations on policymaking could be determined to an extent only in Kosovo and Montenegro, where the share of comments that are accepted in observed public consultations was close to 60%. In the rest of the region, generally there are either no consultation reports at all or they do not state how comments were addressed.

This indicator further looks at the functionalities of national public consultation portals, online portals run by government authorities with the purpose of providing information and ensuring the participation of citizens in public consultation processes. Alternatively, public consultation can be accessed as a part of a wider portals such as e-participation or e-government portals. The indicator separately analyses what can be considered as basic criteria of functionality and those that can rather be considered as advanced criteria.

Although across the region public consultation portals do exist, nowhere have they satisfied all the basic criteria of functionality that this indicator looks for, such as:

1. Searchability of database of consultations for at least 2 years back, with all the information (such as announcements, dates, and responsible authorities) relevant for fully identifying each consultation process;
2. Searchability by year, policy area, institution, and types of document;
3. Availability of public consultation reports for each completed public consultation.

In several cases (Albania, BIH, Kosovo, and Serbia) search engines either do not function properly or do not contain search based on basic categories, while in Montenegro the consultation database was not transferred from the old to the new portal. Moreover, in most cases (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) consultation reports are not systematically published along with other information on past consultations. In the remaining administrations, reports are more regularly published, outside of some cases in which public consultation reports are not published without clear justification (Kosovo).

Regarding the criteria for advanced portal functionalities, the overall regional picture is slightly worse than regarding basic ones. The advanced functionalities monitored include:

1. The option to be notified if public consultations are opened by certain institutions or in certain sectors (meaning the ability to subscribe to one of these options);
2. The option to submit comments directly in the text of proposals;
3. The option to be notified when feedback is provided to submitted comments (by direct reply or in the final consultation report);
4. The option to see the comments submitted by other participants in public consultation;
5. Comprehensive documentation published for each public consultation process apart from the text of proposals (such as RIA sheets and programmes of public consultations).

North Macedonia and Kosovo's portals satisfy almost all the advanced criteria (4 out of 5). For the former, there is no option for portal users to be notified that feedback was submitted for their comments, and for the latter it is not possible to comment directly in the texts of proposals. In the cases of BIH and Albania, consultation portals meet 3 out of 5 listed criteria, and in the remaining cases a minority of advanced criteria are met.

Administrations are not very proactive in informing the public about public consultations in the region except Montenegro. In Montenegro, all the following channels are used to inform the public and announce consultations: webpages of authorities holding consultations, the websites of relevant government offices (such as those for cooperation with civil society), the social media channels of government institutions, e-consultation portals, and the media.

> **Practices to avoid: A functional consultation portal without visitors or comments**
>
> **BIH** has a highly functional portal with good search options - yet very few users, and consulted documents rarely receive any comments. This speaks volumes about the lack of dissemination of information about consultations as well as the lack of trust by the public that public consultations are a meaningful mechanism for them to exert influence and shape policy outcomes.

Regarding civil society perceptions on the quality of public consultations, CSOs are first asked whether formal consultation procedures provide conditions for the effective involvement of the public in policymaking processes. Compared to the previous PAR monitor, the share of respondents who disagree with this statement has increased by 3 percentage points and stands at 39%. Nevertheless, over a third of CSOs (34%) do agree with this statement. Agreement has dropped most significantly in Albania, where in the previous cycle it stood at 45% and now is at 36%. In this cycle, the most positive responses from CSOs to this question are those from Kosovo, with the same percentage in agreement since the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle and among whom 48% agree that consultation procedures effectively ensure the participation of civil society in policymaking. Respondents from the EU accession frontrunner administrations, Montenegro and Serbia, emerge as the most critical on this issue, with 53% and 48% respectively disagreeing. In Serbia, no CSOs expressed strong agreement with the statement, while in Montenegro only 2% did. It is possible that civil society in administrations that are more advanced in the EU accession process have higher expectations from their governments, considering that public consultations in policymaking are known as important conditions of such processes.

Chart 12. CSO responses to the question "Formal consultation procedures provide conditions for an effective involvement of the public in policy-making processes" (%)
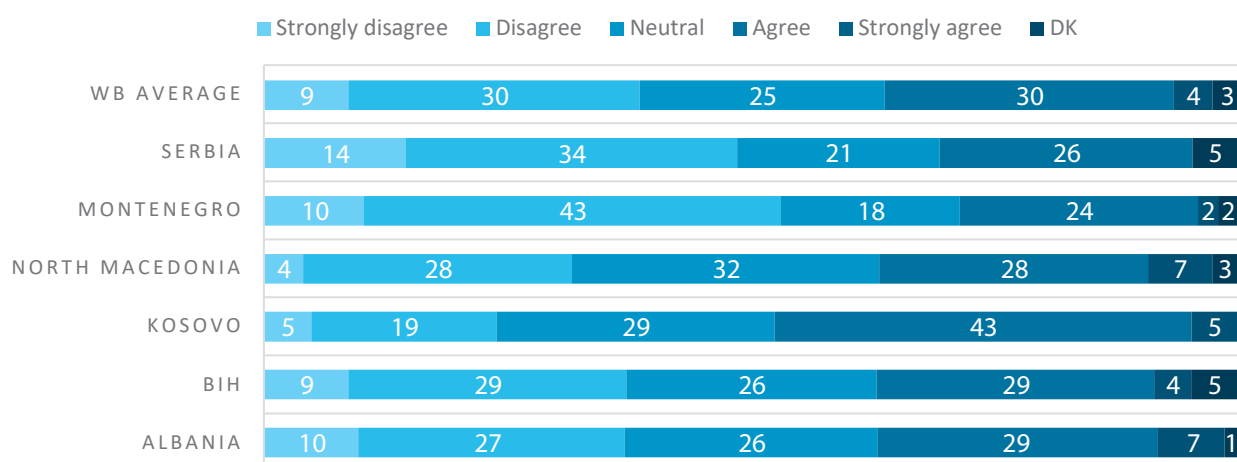
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	9	30	25	30	4	3
SERBIA	14	34	21	26		5
MONTENEGRO	10	43	18	24	2	2
NORTH MACEDONIA	4	28	32	28	7	3
KOSOVO	5	19	29	43		5
BIH	9	29	26	29	4	5
ALBANIA	10	27	26	29	7	1

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

In line with the findings in the previous monitoring cycle, few CSOs in the region agree that government institutions consistently apply formal consultation procedures when developing policy within their purview, at only 22%. At the same time, disagreement with this statement is at 45%, almost identical to the baseline PAR Monitor's result of 44%. Kosovo's CSOs are again more positive on this issue than their peers in the region, while the most negative are Serbian and Bosnian organisations, with over half expressing disagreement. North Macedonian and Montenegrin CSOs do not emerge as much more positive either and mark the largest shares of neutral responses (36 and 37%).

Chart 13. CSO responses to the question "Government institutions consistently apply formal consultation procedures when developing policies within their purview" (%)
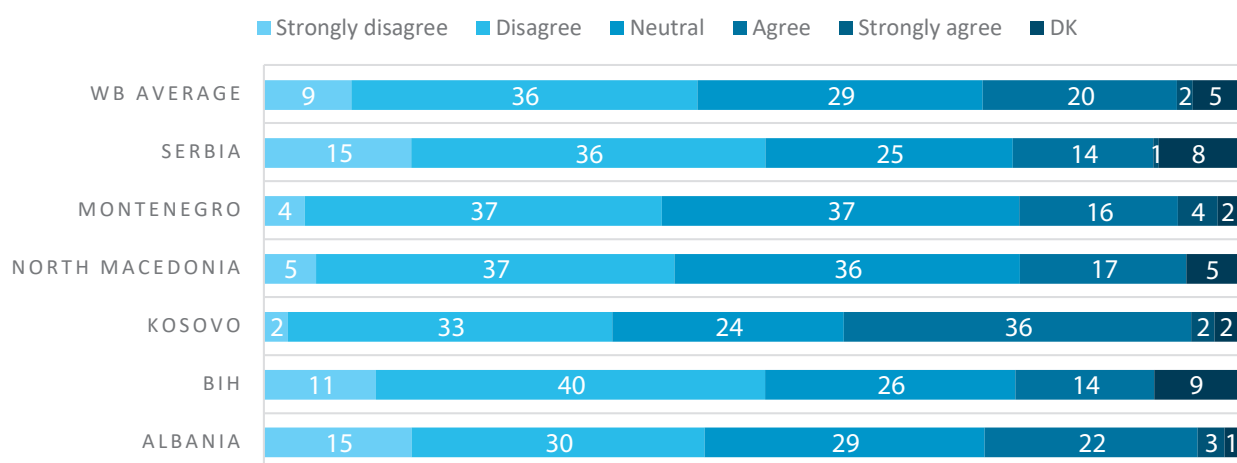
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	9	36	29	20	2	5
SERBIA	15	36	25	14	1	8
MONTENEGRO	4	37	37	16	4	2
NORTH MACEDONIA	5	37	36	17		5
KOSOVO	2	33	24	36	2	2
BIH	11	40	26	14		9
ALBANIA	15	30	29	22	3	1

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N=518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Over half of surveyed CSOs across the region (56%) report they are rarely or never consulted in the early phases of policy or legislative processes, down by 4 percentage points as compared to the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor. The share of those that reply that they are "always" and "often" consulted has also decreased, from 11% to 8%, leaving a third of respondents who state that they are sometimes consulted in early phases. The most negative views on this issue are held by CSOs in Montenegro and BIH, where 67-68% reply with "never" or "rarely". While the share of "often" and "always" responses is highest in Albania (although only 15%), over half of respondents in Kosovo note that they are sometimes consulted in the early phases of policy or legislative processes.

Chart 14. CSO responses to the question "Relevant government institutions consult CSOs in the early phases of policy or legislative processes (before any draft documents are produced)" (%)
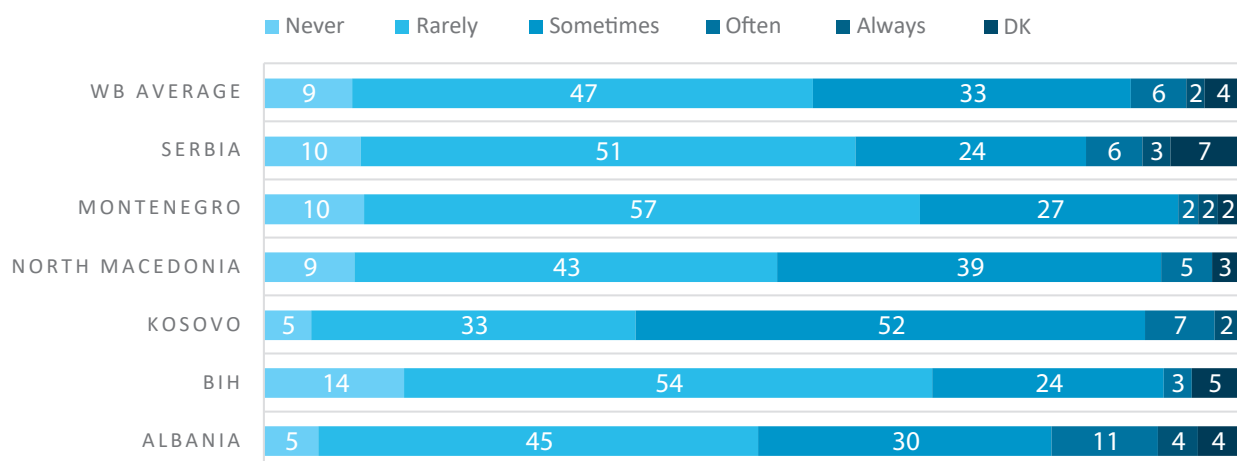
Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N=518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

The share of CSOs who agree that they are provided with information on the content of consulted proposals in a timely manner is unchanged since the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, standing at 17%. Disagreement with this statement has also remained at the same level of 45%. Bosnian and Serbian organisations are the most negative in this case, with 50% disagreeing, while those in Kosovo are the most positive with almost a quarter agreeing.

Also, one in five CSOs think that the information that they are provided on the content of legislative or policy proposals in consultation processes is adequate, while 37% disagree across the region. A surprisingly high share of CSOs provide a neutral reply to this question: 40% at the regional level and 51% in North Macedonia. In fact, as questions become more specific, the share of neutral responses increases, which may indicate that many CSOs do not frequently participate in consultation processes, for which reason they do not hold strong opinions on their specifics.

Perceptions are quite negative when it comes to the question of how frequently relevant ministries ensure that diverse interest groups are represented. The percentage of respondents who state that this never or rarely the cases has increased by 3 percentage points since the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor and now stands at 49%. The share of positive responses ("often" and "always") has simultaneously decreased, from 12% to 10%. The most negative views are those of CSOs in BIH, where no organisations reply with "always" and only 6% reply with "often", while "rarely" and "never" responses account for 65% of the total.

Chart 15. CSO responses to the question "Relevant ministries ensure that diverse interest groups are represented in public consultation processes (such as women, minorities, trade unions, employers' associations, and others)" (%)

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

CSOs across the WB predominantly feel (56% of respondents) that when organising consultations, ministries never or rarely provide written feedback to consultees on what happened to their input. This is down by 3 percentage points from the previous monitoring cycle. At the same time, slightly above one in ten respondents think that this is always or often the case. CSOs from Kosovo are the most positive in this regard, whereas those from BIH and Serbia are the most negative, with 62-64% denying the prevalence of this practice.

Chart 16. CSO responses to the question "Relevant ministries provide written feedback to consultees on whether their inputs are accepted or rejected" (%)
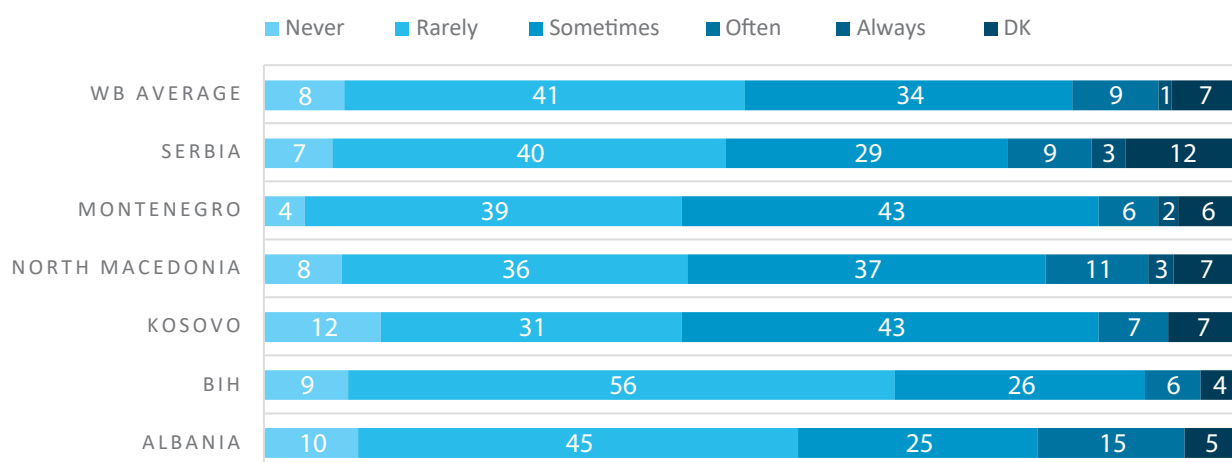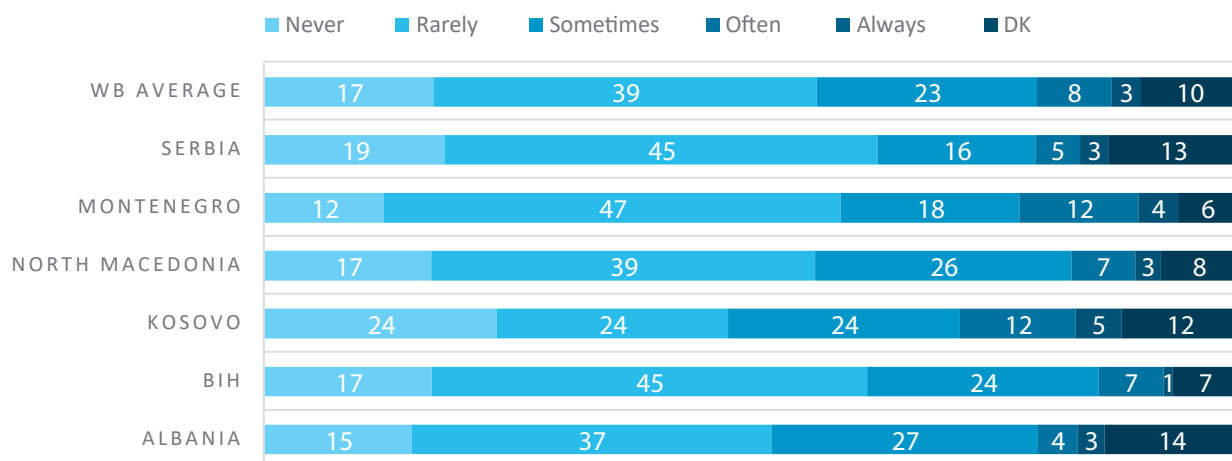

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

Somewhat better perceptions are observed regarding how often ministries accept feedback CSOs provide in consultation processes. The percentage of respondents who deny the presence of this practice by responding with "never" or "rarely" has dropped slightly since the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor, from 46% to 42%. The more positive picture is painted by CSOs from Kosovo, since only 22% of them provide the two most negative answers, while 45% reply with "sometimes", indicating some level of practice. At the regional level, almost a third of CSOs share this middle opinion.

Chart 17. CSO responses to the question "In the consultation process, relevant ministries accept the feedback coming from my organisation" (%)
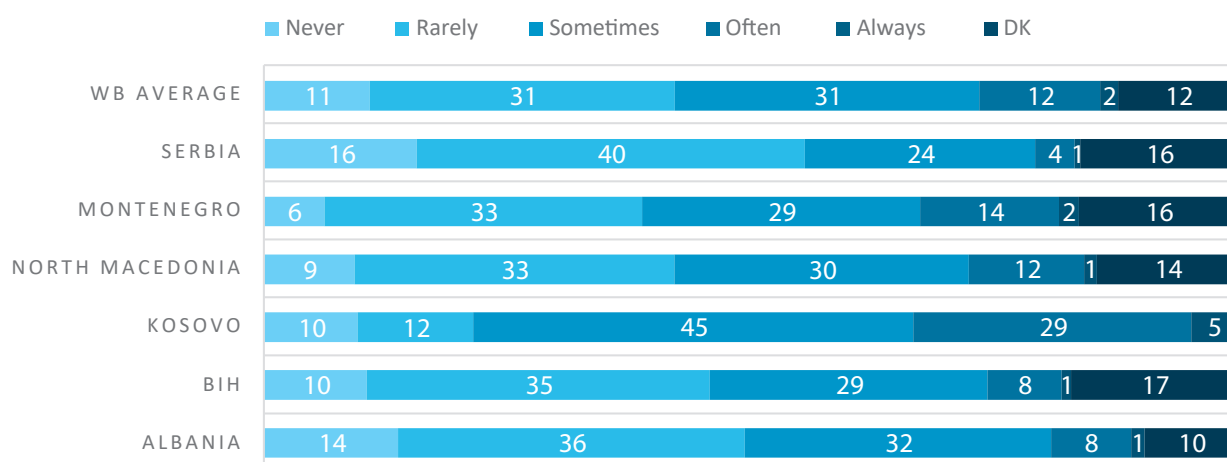
Legend: Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always ■ DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	11	31	31	12	2	12
SERBIA	16	40	24	4	1	16
MONTENEGRO	6	33	29	14	2	16
NORTH MACEDONIA	9	33	30	12	1	14
KOSOVO	10	12	45	29		5
BIH	10	35	29	8	1	17
ALBANIA	14	36	32	8	1	10

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 518 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Finally, CSOs were asked how often ministries go the extra mile by organising additional consultations with CSOs beyond the scope of formal public consultations. As in the previous monitoring cycle, a clear majority denies this practice, with 59% replying with "never" or "rarely". Only 4% of respondents at the regional level confirm this to take place often, while under 1% say that this is always the case. CSOs in Kosovo are once again the least negative, with 36% replying with "sometimes" and 7% with "often".

Overall, civil society perceptions of the involvement of external actors in policymaking once again show that they see key aspects of public consultations implemented poorly or not implemented at all (such as early consultations, the provision of feedback, and other practices). Moreover, public consultations that are actually conducted in practice are lacking in frequency, regularity in reporting, and quality in terms of the provision of feedback. For these reasons, indicator values in the entire region have remained rather low.

Graph 7: Indicator values for PDC_P11_I1 "Inclusiveness and openness of policymaking"[57]

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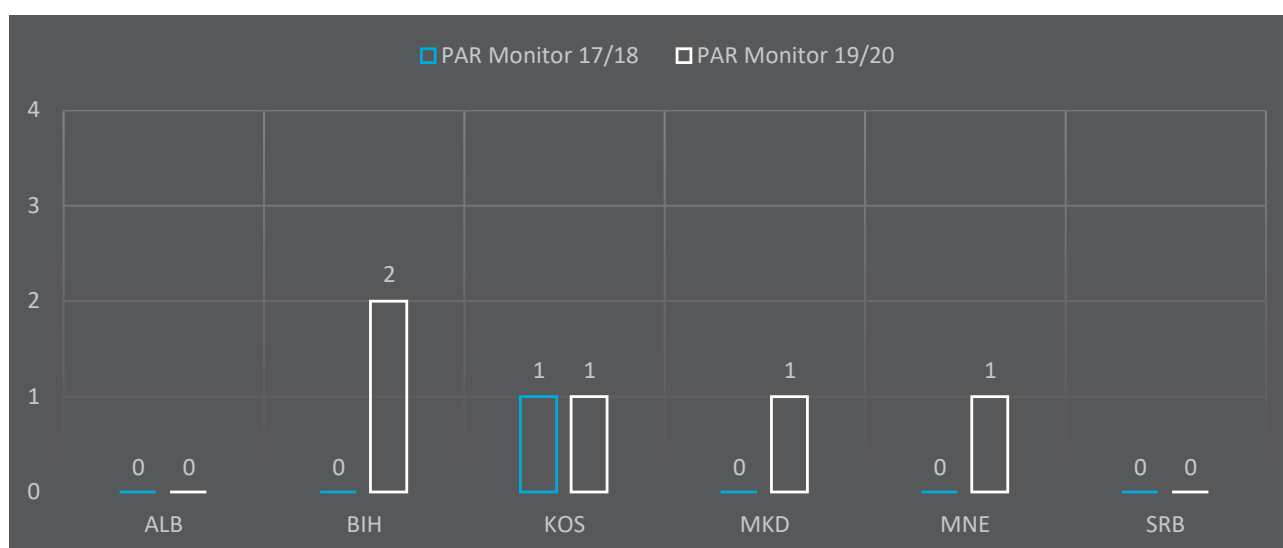
57   The results for this indicator are shown on separate charts, as the indicator was significantly changed after the first monitoring exercise. As a result of this change it is not possible to create a time series and show comparability between the two cycles.

III.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION AREA

In this area, WeBER monitors the transparency of governments' reporting and decision-making, the use of civil society analyses and evidence in policymaking, and the inclusiveness of policymaking practices through public consultations.

Governments in the region still do not adequately publish performance information on their work. Communication through press releases is fairly common, but less so when it comes to annual work and performance reports. The CoM of BIH has kept up with its good practice of consistently publishing annual reports, and improvements in regularity of publishing are noted in North Macedonia and Montenegro. Half of the governments in the region have reader-friendly approaches to annual reporting (BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia), but information on results, rather than activities, remains scarce. Implementation reports for whole-of-government strategic plans are the rarest in Albania (33%) and most common in Serbia (80%). Surveyed CSOs in the region mostly believe that governments do not pursue planned objectives, and 47% disagree there is a direct connection between government workplans and actual policy developments. Also, the majority of CSOs disagree that governments regularly report to the public on how they meet policy objectives (58%).

On the transparency of governmental decision-making, results are almost identical to those of the baseline PAR Monitor. Only 13% of surveyed CSOs in the region agree that their government's decision-making is generally transparent. Analysis of publicly released materials following government sessions shows that most governments still provide information on their activities through press releases and the publication of adopted decisions and documents, while agendas and minutes from sessions of governments remain hidden from the public in half of the region (Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia).

Since the baseline PAR Monitor, policymaking bodies in the region have used CSO evidence to a slightly higher degree in their policy development. References to CSOs' findings are still more frequently found in adopted policy documents than in policy papers or impact assessments. As in the previous monitoring cycle, 38% of surveyed CSOs agree that government institutions invite them to prepare or submit policy papers and studies. Perceptions remain favourable when CSOs were asked how often government institutions accept their invitations to participate in events promoting CSOs' policy products (52%). Perceptions of CSOs' involvement in policymaking working groups remain less positive, with 57% noting that ministries rarely or never justify the acceptance or rejection of proposals they make in such forums.

There is still little public involvement in the adoption of legislation and policy documents, and it has a largely insignificant impact. Public authorities rarely publish consultation reports when they conduct consultations, with somewhat better practice noted for formal public debates preceding government approval of bills. In most cases in BIH, Kosovo, and Montenegro, and in over 70% of cases in Serbia, public debates end with the publication of reports. However, reports do not always list all individual comments, so it is often unclear whether they were accepted or not and why. Though public consultation portals exist across the region, they fail to satisfy either the basic or advanced criteria of functionality. Perception of CSOs informs there is no change in opinions, compared to the baseline monitoring cycle, on whether government institutions consistently apply consultation procedures when developing policies, with only 22% agreeing. The majority of CSOs in the region believe that ministries rarely or never provide written feedback on their inputs during consultations or consult them at the early phases of policy development (56%).

IV. PUBLIC SERVICE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Civil servants – the employees in administrations who perform key tasks in policy design and service delivery – greatly affect public perception of the government at large. Developed democracies as a rule boast professional, largely apolitical civil services, which have been recognised as a crucial component of good public governance. Since the work of civil servants (also referred to as public servants) is based on protecting the public interest rather than private or political interests, a modern civil service must be governed by specific rules that differ from general labour regulations. Those rules are codified in civil service legislation, which sets standards and procedures for keeping civil service merit-based and apolitical, ensuring the integrity and individual accountability of civil servants (such as in cases of breaches of administrative procedure in dealing with citizens), as well as sufficient security of their job positions to protect them from politically motivated dismissals.

In addition to having sound legal frameworks which regulate such areas as the rights and duties of civil servants, their position and procedures for recruitment and dismissal, modern administrations also develop strategic approaches to human resource management (HRM). Strategic HRM systems serve to attract and retain high quality staff in administrations with an understanding that the government sector cannot easily compete with the private sector, primarily in terms of financial incentives.

IV.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018

Since the beginning of democratic transition in the Western Balkans (WB), civil service laws have been adopted and implemented across the region. Assistance provided by SIGMA and the EU largely prompted these governments to focus on public administration reform early on. Among the six key areas of this reform, the area of public service and human resource management (PSHRM) is certainly one of the most important, with its emphasis on the professionalism and integrity of civil servants. All governments in the region have had civil service legislation for years now and have amended or changed relevant laws multiple times.

Responsibility for designing HRM policy lies with different institutions in different parts of the region. In four out of six cases (Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), this responsibility lies with the ministries in charge of public administration. The responsible body in Albania is the Department of Public Administration (DoPA) and at the state level in BIH the Ministry of Justice. It is important to note, however, that these bodies are not necessarily responsible for all aspects of HRM policy. Implementation of certain aspects is often delegated to other institutions, such as, for instance, the Administration Agency in North Macedonia, the Civil Service Agency as a state level institution of BIH, and HRM offices in Montenegro and Serbia. Similarly, special training institutions have the authority to implement professional development portfolios in Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia – the Albanian School of Public Administration, the Kosovo Institute of Public Administration, and the National Academy for Public Administration in Serbia. Civil service laws in Albania and Kosovo establish specialised bodies for the independent monitoring of civil service. Finally, in Serbia, a separate body, the High Civil Service Council, manages aspects of recruitment and management procedures in the senior civil service (SCS).

> ### Good practices: Independent oversight over civil service
>
> A continued good practice in the area of independent oversight over the civil service comes from **Albania**, where the Commissioner for Oversight of the Civil Service (COCS) was set up by the civil service law (CSL) as an independent public body that reports to the Parliament. In 2019, the commissioner conducted inspections of 74 institutions, finding irregularities in 79% of the supervised cases, either in the organisation of human resources in institutions or compliance with procedures for admission to the civil service (identified cases of appointments without prior competition procedures).[58] The existence of such a supervisory body helps fight politicisation and improve the professionalism of the civil service. A similar oversight body (the Independent Civil Service Oversight Board) is still operational in Kosovo, too, but evidence suggests lower levels of activity than the Albanian COCS.[59]

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58   Commissioner for Civil Service Oversight, "Report on the Activity of the Commissioner for Civil Service Oversight, January 1st – December 31st 2019," Tirana, March 2020, available at https://bit.ly/3h2mYpB (last accessed 20 April 2021).

59   For example, the last annual report available on the webpage of the Independent Oversight Board for the Civil Service in Kosovo is from 2017. More information is available at https://kpmshc.rks-gov.net/al/ (last accessed 10 April 2021).

◼ Scope of civil service

Legislative frameworks in most administrations are in accordance with SIGMA's principles of public administration, although with certain deficiencies. In Montenegro, Serbia and, to some extent, North Macedonia, some aspects of HRM are for certain institutions regulated by special legislation.[60] In Albania, there are unjustified exceptions to the scope of civil service, related to certain institutions being subordinated to the Prime Minister, and more such exemptions have been noted in the last few years. When it comes to Kosovo, problems arise on the lower end of the civil service hierarchy, as it is unclear whether certain non-administrative support positions fall under the scope of civil service or not. The problem in vertical scope is also present in BIH, though at the bottom end, as the Civil Service Law does not cover numerous positions in the lower echelons of the hierarchy within institutions, even though it covers the institutions themselves.

When it comes to the upper end of the vertical scope (where administration meets politics), there are considerable issues in terms of professionalism and political influence. The Principles of Public Administration prescribe that senior civil servants (SCS) are to be protected from political influence, both in recruitment and termination procedures. However, administrations in the region face significant challenges in meeting these criteria, primarily in that "acting managers" are appointed to senior civil service positions. Acting positions are still commonly used and barely constrained by law. Even if constrained, administrations often openly break such laws regarding the duration of acting appointments (such as in Serbia). It can be said that the public administration in Kosovo has the strictest regulation of acting appointments, such that, for instance, these appointments come only from within the civil service. The civil service law in Montenegro introduced a similar restriction in 2018, though leaving more room to manoeuvre than the legislation in Kosovo; if a suitable candidate is not found in any government institution, external candidates may be appointed. The latest amendments (from January 2021) have reduced the level of professional qualifications required for specific civil service categories as well as further opened up acting senior positions to appointments from outside the civil service. In Serbia, appointments of acting managements have been legally constrained to existing civil servants in a recent civil service law (CSL) amendment, but those provisions are regularly ignored by the government.

◼ Recruitment

Most administrations in the region have predominantly centralised recruitment procedures (conducted by a central institution), but there are noticeable variations between them. For instance, while Albania has remained centralised (meaning with no major changes since the 2017/18 monitoring cycle), Kosovo has a primarily decentralised system but is moving towards centralisation. The systems in BIH and Montenegro still have a prevailing centralised nature. In Serbia, the central HRM Office of the Government gained a new responsibility, namely for assessing behavioural competencies[61] and managing written exams for testing general functional competencies[62] for most civil service candidates (with some exceptions such as the Administration for Execution of Criminal Sanctions), showcasing a new tendency towards centralisation of the recruitment system. This drive towards centralisation has recently largely been driven by efforts to neutralise political influence over recruitment processes.

When it comes to regulations ensuring merit-based recruitment for senior civil service managers, Albania and Kosovo have more comprehensive frameworks than in BIH, Montenegro and Serbia, while North Macedonia does not receive a positive evaluation. It is important to note that, as mentioned before, Serbia has introduced written exams to test general functional competences, but not job specific competences of candidates applying for civil service jobs. Similar exams are also part of the selection procedure for senior-level civil servants in Montenegro, somewhat reducing the role of interviews in recruitment processes. An issue that remains regarding recruitment procedures for SCS (especially in Montenegro and Serbia) is the high level of discretion of the heads of recruiting authorities, who can select any candidate from lists of the three best-ranked candidates or (in Serbia) choose not to select any.

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60 For example, such aspects can relate to recruitment, selection, or remuneration, and they can be specially regulated for institutions such as tax administrations or ministries of the interior.

61 The following methods of assessment may be used: psychometric tests, behaviour sampling, competence-based interview, and questionnaires.

62 There are three phases in testing general functional competencies. A test with closed-ended questions (assessing the knowledge in "Organisation and operation of state authorities of the Republic of Serbia"), is followed by practical work on the computer (assessing "Digital literacy"), while the final part consists of a written simulation (assessing "Business communication").

HRM information systems

For the proper design and implementation of HRM policy, it is of great importance that responsible authorities possess complete and reliable data about their human resources. There have been efforts to develop human resource management information systems (HRMIS) in all administrations of the region, yet they have shown differing rates of success. In sum, no state administration in the region has a completely developed system for collecting and monitoring HR data.

The currently operational HRMISs in Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are assessed somewhat better than the other cases. Even in these cases, however, the data stored is incomplete and not entirely functional. This means that all institutions should use the central database system; when this is not the case (as in Albania and Montenegro), databases are incomplete. As for functionality, this means that HRMISs (such as those in Albania and North Macedonia) do not enable generating quick reports on divisions of public servants by, for instance, administrative bodies where they work or by average salaries for different staff categories.

Issues in the remaining three administrations are somewhat more complex. Most civil service institutions do not update their systems regularly and do not use the functionalities that effective HRMISs provide (such as automatic drafting of HRM related decisions and bases for strategic HRM planning). There is also a lack of interoperability between HRMISs and other registers (such as those of treasuries).

Remuneration systems

Most public administrations in the region have simply structured remuneration systems, meaning that the key integral parts of the salary structure are defined in legislation. There are, however, some variations. At the state level of BIH and in North Macedonia, for instance, salary components are clearly defined in primary legislation. Primary legislation at the state level of BIH, however, also recognises several salary allowances (such as an allowance for carrying out the work of other posts), which allows for a high level of discretion in increasing salary levels without proper justification. Serbia also has a simple legislative framework for civil servants' salaries, which became fragmented when some institutions were excluded by special laws and bylaws. In the period of 2019-2020, some progress was made in equalising the coefficient levels between all civil service institutions, but the system's unity was undermined by different levels of base pay in different institutions,[63] allowed for by the annual budget law. The remuneration system in Kosovo is still completely decentralised. Although the new Law on Salaries in the Public Sector, which also focused on civil servants' salaries, was adopted in 2019, it was soon annulled by decision of the Constitutional Court, and the system has remained overly fragmented.

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63   For example, the Tax Authority, the Customs Authority, Ministry of Interior, civil servants in courts and prosecutors' offices, and others.

IV.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

WeBER monitoring within the PSHRM area covers five SIGMA Principles and relates exclusively to central administration (centre of government institutions, ministries, subordinated bodies, and special organisations). In other words, WeBER monitoring focuses on central government civil service, as defined by relevant legislation (primarily civil service laws). The selected principles are those that focus on the quality and practical implementation of legal and policy frameworks for civil service, and on measures related to merit-based recruitment, the use of temporary engagements, the transparency of remuneration systems, and integrity and anti-corruption measures in civil service. The WeBER approach was based on elements which SIGMA does not strongly focus on in its monitoring, but which are significant to civil society from the perspective of the transparency of the civil service system and government openness and the public availability of data on the implementation of civil service policy.

The following SIGMA principles were selected for monitoring, in line with the WeBER's selection criteria:

Principle 2: The policy and legal frameworks for a professional and coherent public service are established and applied in practice; the institutional set-up enables consistent and effective human resource management practices across the public service.

Principle 3: The recruitment of public servants is based on merit and equal treatment in all its phases; the criteria for demotion and termination of public servants are explicit.

Principle 4: Direct or indirect political influence on senior managerial positions in the public service is prevented

Principle 5: The remuneration system of public servants is based on the job classification; it is fair and transparent.

Principle 7: Measures for promoting integrity, preventing corruption and ensuring discipline in the public service are in place.

The monitoring of these principles combines WeBER monitoring with findings of SIGMA's assessments within specific sub-indicators. However, **bearing in mind that there was no SIGMA assessment in 2020, WeBER researchers performed their own calculation of SIGMA sub-indicators in this PAR Monitor cycle on the basis of SIGMA's methodology.**[64] **Only the authors of this report (and not SIGMA/OECD) can be held responsible for the results of this calculation.**

In addition, WeBER monitoring is based on expert review of legislation, documents, and websites, including the collection and analysis of government administrative data, reports, and other documents searched for online or requested through freedom of information (FOI) requests. To follow a more balanced qualitative and quantitative approach, the research included measures of the perceptions of civil servants, CSOs, and the wider public gathered through perception surveys. Finally, data collection included semi-structured, face-to-face-interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders such as senior civil servants, former senior civil servants, and former candidates for jobs in civil service, as well as representatives from government institutions in charge of human resource management policy.

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64   SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", May 2019, Paris, France, https://bit.ly/3dZa2P5 (last accessed on 20 April 2021).

Surveys of civil servants and CSOs across the Western Balkans were implemented using an online survey tool between the second half of June and the beginning of August 2020.[65] The civil servants' survey was, in most administrations, disseminated through a single contact point originating from national institutions responsible for the overall civil service system. The CSO survey was distributed through existing networks and platforms of CSOs with large contact databases, as well as through centralised points of contact such as governmental offices in charge of cooperation with civil society. To ensure that the CSO survey targeted as many organisations as possible in terms of types of organisations, geographical distribution, and activity areas, and hence was widely representative, additional boosting was done where needed. Finally, public perception survey included computer-assisted personal interviewing of the general public (aged 18 and older) in the Western Balkans region over the period of 5 May to 30 May 2020.[66] In all three surveys, WeBER used uniform questionnaires throughout the region and disseminated them in local languages, ensuring an even approach in survey implementation.

WeBER uses six indicators to measure the five principles mentioned above. In the first indicator, WeBER monitors the public availability of official data and reports about civil service and employees in central state administrations. In the second indicator, monitoring includes the extent to which widely applied temporary engagement procedures undermine merit-based regimes. Openness, transparency, and fairness of recruitment into civil service, as particularly critical aspects of HRM in public administrations due to their public facing character, are examined within the third indicator. The fourth indicator focuses on measures for the prevention of direct and indirect political influence on senior managerial positions in public service, while the fifth indicator analyses whether information on civil service remuneration is transparent, clear, and publicly available. Finally, in the sixth indicator, WeBER examines measures for the promotion of integrity and prevention of corruption in civil service.

IV.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 2: THE POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR A PROFESSIONAL AND COHERENT PUBLIC SERVICE ARE ESTABLISHED AND APPLIED IN PRACTICE; THE INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP ENABLES CONSISTENT AND EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ACROSS THE PUBLIC SERVICE

This principle is measured through the indicator "Public availability of official data and reports about the civil service and employees in central state administration" (PSHRM_P2_I1). Comprising nine elements for which monitoring is based on document and website analysis, this indicator provides insight into governments' reporting practices in the area of public/civil service.

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65   Surveys were administered through an anonymous, online questionnaire. The data collection method included CASI (computer-assisted self-interviewing). More information is available in the Methodology Appendix.

66   Perceptions are explored with a survey targeting the public (aged 18 and older) in the Western Balkans. The public perception survey employed multi-stage probability sampling and was administered through computer-assisted web and telephone interviewing (CAWI and CATI), using a standardised questionnaire in omnibus surveys in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia in the period between 5 May and 30 May 2020. More information is available in the Methodology Appendix.

Table 18: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P2_I1 "Public availability of official data and reports about the civil service and employees in central state administration"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. The Government keeps reliable data pertaining to the public service	4	2	0	0	2	2	0
E2. The Government regularly publishes basic official data pertaining to the public service	4	0	2	0	4	2	0
E3. Published official data includes data on employees other than full-time civil servants in the central state administration	4	0	0	0	2	2	0
E4. Published official data on public service is segregated based on gender and ethnic structure	2	2	1	0	1	0	0
E5. Published official data is available in open data format(s)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
E6. The government comprehensively reports on the public service policy	4	4	2	0	0	2	2
E7. The government regularly reports on the public service policy	2	2	0	0	0	2	1
E8. Reports on the public service include substantiated information concerning the quality and/or outcomes of the public service work	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
E9. Data and information about the public service are actively promoted to the public	2	2	0	0	2	0	2
Total points	**25**	**13**	**5**	**0**	**11**	**10**	**6**
Indicator value 2019/2020[67]	**0-5**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**1**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	0	2	2	1	0

The first element (E1) in this monitoring cycle was calculated by WeBER researchers based on SIGMA's Methodological Framework.[68] The analysis reveals that no administration in the region has a fully established system for collecting and monitoring data on public service. While BIH does not have a centralised HR database on the state level and decentralised information was unavailable, HRMISs in Montenegro and Serbia lack interoperability with other important registers (e.g., the payroll system) and data are not regularly updated. Kosovo's administration did not provide data for assessment purposes. On the other hand, Albania and North Macedonia are assessed somewhat more positively, having invested efforts into developing reliable information systems for civil service, even though these systems are not yet complete and fully functional.

Regarding whether governments (or other responsible institutions) regularly publish basic official data on numbers of civil servants, best practices are observed in North Macedonia. North Macedonia achieved the highest scores in this regard, as the Ministry of Information Society and Administration regularly publishes easily accessible, annual reports from the Register of Employees in the Public Sector. Such data is also published by the Civil Service Agency in BIH for the state level institutions, but only in a basic sense (meaning just the overall number of civil servants). Furthermore, Montenegro's administration publishes all requested data, but not regularly (no data was found for 2017). Finally, Kosovo and Serbia disclose no cumulative numerical data on civil service, while Albania does publish some information (on the number of civil servants appointed per year by rank), but this data is incomplete.

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67 Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-9 points = 1; 10-13 points = 2; 14-17 points = 3; 18-21 points = 4; 22-25 points = 5.

68 More specifically, SIGMA Sub-indicator 7 – "Existence of a functional HR database with data on civil service" of the Indicator 3.2.1 – "Adequacy of the policy, legal framework and institutional set-up for professional human resource management in public service". See: SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", op. cit.

Published data vary in terms of the detail they provide. For example, out of the administrations that do publish data on their civil service, only Montenegro and North Macedonia include employees other than full-time civil servants (i.e. fixed-term civil servants or general employees). As in the previous monitoring cycle, no administration publishes data on temporarily engaged experts and reports that are being published contain some segregation of data based on sex or nationality, but not in a detailed manner (i.e. not for all statistical categories). There are no open data practices, regarding the civil service data, recorded in the region.

Practices to avoid: Reduction of transparency due to government changes

Due to the merger between two ministries in **Kosovo** (the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Internal Affairs), following a change of government, the website of the Ministry of Public Administration was unavailable for a prolonged period. As a result, no reports were available to the public. Although some reports were obtained for the purposes of WeBER monitoring via FOI request, Kosovo marks a significant decrease in the value of this indicator compared to that of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, as the reports were no longer publicly available.

Looking at reporting practices on more specific areas of civil service policy, such as planning and recruitment, promotions, appraisals, disciplinary procedures, and integrity and anti-corruption measures,[69] the situation is different. North Macedonia is somewhat behind other public administrations in this regard because the majority of such reports in this case are either not adopted or published. Likewise, reports from Kosovo are not available. As for BIH, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, reporting is moderately comprehensive, with issues being either that 2019 reports were not adopted at the time of monitoring (from June to July 2020) or that multiple key issues are not covered. Moreover, for Serbia no single comprehensive report on civil service policy is available, with information requiring searches in several separate reports. Even these reports, however, do not cover all the key issues (see the footnote) analysed within this indicator. In contrast, the 2019 annual report from Albania is available and covers almost all of the key issues (6 of 7) in a single document, although the information included lacks more analysis rather than only description.

Good practices: Reporting to the public on civil service policy

In continuing with the previously identified good practice, the Civil Service Law in **Albania** requires the Council of Ministers to report annually to the Parliament on public service policies and their implementation. Department of Public Administration (DoPA) produces annual reports, which are available online. The annual report for 2019 included sections on planning and recruitment, career development (particularly mobility in the public service), training, appraisals, salaries and wages, disciplinary procedures and decisions, and integrity issues and measures.[70]

With regard to whether governments engage in any dissemination or promotion of data on civil service, three of the six governments appear to invest effort in this area. These include Albania and North Macedonia, where data is promoted through ministries' websites and social media channels, as well as Serbia, where the National Academy for Public Administration and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-government disseminated data specifically related to the training of civil servants through social media, online media, and webpage articles. Data on civil servants is, however, not actively promoted in BIH and Montenegro, while in the case of Kosovo it was not possible to determine the presence of promotion efforts due to the dysfunctionality of the webpage of the ministry responsible for public administration at the time of monitoring. Lack of promotion efforts may suggest that governments either do not recognise the importance of accountability or that they are concerned about potential public reactions to what can be seen as oversized and insufficiently efficient administrations.

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69   The key elements of civil service policy that WeBER looks for are: 1. planning and recruitments, 2. appraisals, 3. career development (promotions and demotions), 4. trainings (professional development programmes), 5. salaries/wages, 6. disciplinary procedures and decisions and 7. corruption/integrity issues and measures.

70   DoPA, "Raport vjetor 2019 – Shërbimi Civil", 2019, https://bit.ly/3eKQlK0 (last accessed 28 April 2021).

In general, compared to the results of the previous PAR monitor, this indicator's values changed for the better in Montenegro and Serbia (1 point higher in the indicator value for each administration) and for the worse in Kosovo (2 points lower). In the case of Serbia, this change is the result of information about civil service being actively promoted on social media, while in Montenegro analysis of HRMIS yielded a better assessment than was the case in the previous monitoring cycle. As for Kosovo, the unavailability of the 2019 report on the state of civil service hurt the score this administration receives for transparency.

Graph 8: Indicator values for PSHRM_P2_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
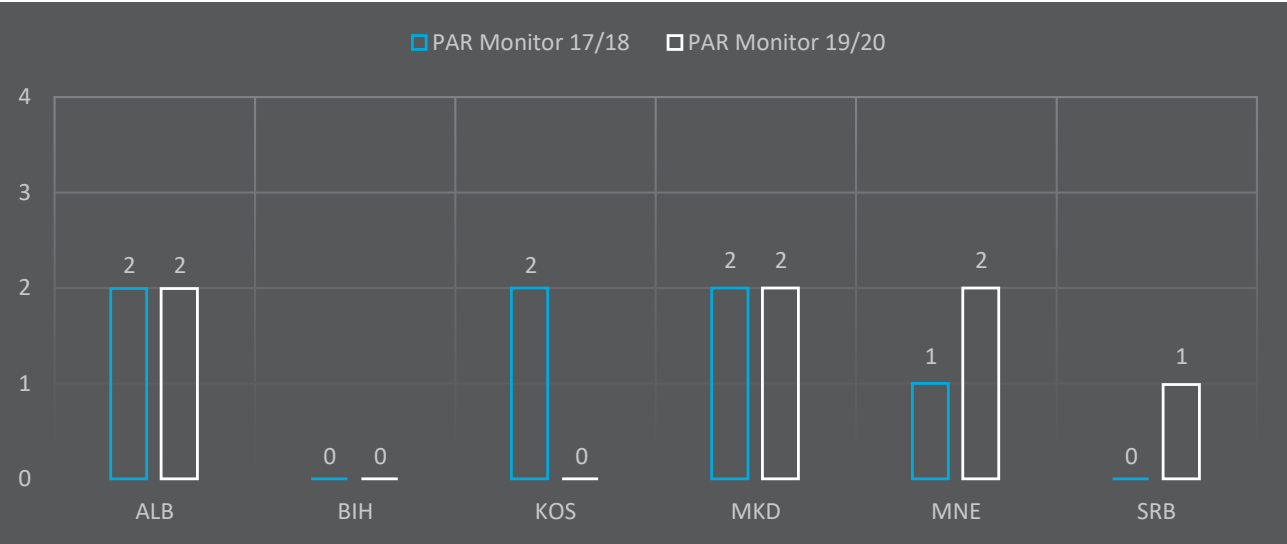
The second WeBER indicator under Principle 2 focuses on the policy and legal frameworks. This indicator analyses the "Performance of tasks characteristic for civil service outside of the civil service merit-based regime" (indicator PSHRM_P2_I2).

Table 19: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P2_I2 "Performance of tasks characteristic for civil service outside of the civil service merit-based regime

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. The number of temporary engagements for performance of tasks characteristic of civil service in the central state administration is limited by law	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
E2. There are specific criteria determined for the selection of individuals for temporary engagements in the state administration.	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E3. The hiring procedure for individuals engaged on temporary contracts is open and transparent	4	0	0	4	0	0	0
E4. Duration of temporary engagement contracts is limited	4	0	2	4	2	0	0
E5. Civil servants perceive that temporary engagements in the administration are an exception	2	1	0	1	0	1	0
E6. Civil servants perceive that performance of tasks characteristic of civil service by individuals hired on a temporary basis is an exception	2	1	1	0	0	1	0
E7. Civil servants perceive that appointments on a temporary basis in the administration are merit-based	2	1	1	0	0	1	1
E8. Civil servants perceive that the formal rules for appointments on a temporary basis are applied in practice	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
E9. Civil servants perceive that individuals hired on a temporary basis go on to become civil servants after their contracts end	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
E10. Civil servants perceive that contracts for temporary engagements are extended to more than one year	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total points	**28**	**6**	**5**	**10**	**3**	**5**	**6**
Indicator value 2019/2020[71]	**0-5**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**1**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	1	1	1	1	1

Approaches that the six governments in the region take to regulate temporary engagements in their state administrations are quite diverse. While BIH, Montenegro, and Serbia mainly apply the framework of labour laws for such engagements, in North Macedonia these engagements are partly regulated through the Law on Agencies for Temporary Employments. In Serbia, formal legal requirements for transparent recruitment to temporary positions were included into the CSL, but enforcement of these provisions has been significantly postponed (currently until 2023).[72] The civil service law in Kosovo regulates employments shorter than 6 months through "special service agreements". Additionally, in Albania and Serbia, for specific types of contracts of a temporary nature, procedures are regulated by public procurement laws (temporary and service contracts within the Labour Law in Serbia and consultancy contracts in Albania).

In most administrations there is no statutory limit to the number/percentage of temporary engagements for performance of tasks characteristic of civil service. Serbia is the only exception in this regard, with Article 27e of the Law on Budgetary System prescribing a limit of 10% of the total number of employees paid from the state budget to be of this category. In Albania and Montenegro there are certain limits but not as strict. In the Albanian case, for instance, these limits are set by decision of the Council of Ministers (which frequently changes). In Montenegro, limits are set by the Plan of Optimisation of the Public Sector, which is not a part of what is considered legislation. Finally, in North Macedonia, BIH, and Kosovo there are no limits to the number

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71 Conversion of points: 0-4 points = 0; 5-9 points = 1; 10-14 points = 2; 15-19 points = 3; 20-24 points = 4; 25-28 points = 5.

72 Article 2, Law Amending the Law on Civil Servants, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no. 157/2020. The legal requirement to conduct public competitions for temporary engagements applies to cases involving temporarily increased volumes of work only. More information is available at https://bit.ly/3nA51Q4 (last accessed on 20 April 2021).

of temporary engagements at the level of entire central state administration. There are some institution-level limits in North Macedonia, but these have less binding power and are prone to change frequently. Setting hard statutory limits on temporary engagements is probably burdensome for ministries from the perspective of human and financial resources management. This eventually diminishes incentives for governments to pass such legislation.

When it comes to hiring procedures for temporary employees and durations of temporary engagements, there is not much variation between administrations in the region, in that: 1) there are no specific selection criteria (such as certain requirements or competences) for all types of temporary engagements, and 2) durations of temporary appointments either lack strict limitations (Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania) or are strictly limited, but to a period that exceeds one year (BIH and North Macedonia). Kosovo, whose law on civil servants prescribes a maximum duration of one year for special service contracts and where temporary hiring is done in a transparent manner, is a positive exception in this case. Furthermore, most administrations do not announce competitions when hiring individuals on a temporary basis, or they do not do it uniformly for all established types or purposes of temporary engagements. The lack of clear and transparent criteria and limitations on temporary engagements in central administrations suggests that there are significant flaws that hinder achievement of merit-based administration.

Civil servants' perceptions (collected through an online survey) show that they see temporary hiring as a common and poorly regulated practice. In most administrations, nearly half of respondents disagree that temporary hiring is an exception in their institutions, in line with the findings of the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor. The perception in North Macedonia is the most negative, as 53% disagree. The exceptions are Albania and Montenegro with 26% and 34% disagreeing respectively. Furthermore, around 40% of civil servants on average (in the entire region) find that it is often or always the case that individuals hired on temporary bases perform tasks which should normally be performed by civil servants (Chart 18). The situation is somewhat better in Albania and Montenegro than in the other cases, as over 40% of respondents from these two countries report that this is rather rare. Overall, these figures are fairly similar to the results of the civil servants' perception survey in the 2017/18 monitoring cycle.

Chart 18: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "Individuals who are hired on a temporary basis perform tasks which should normally be performed by civil servants"

	Never or almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always	DK
WB AVERAGE	12	18	15	24	15	16
SERBIA	10	17	11	23	19	21
MONTENEGRO	18	24	14	18	9	18
NORTH MACEDONIA	6	11	21	24	21	17
KOSOVO	7	16	11	39	14	12
BIH	11	19	18	26	13	13
ALBANIA	20	24	12	14	12	18
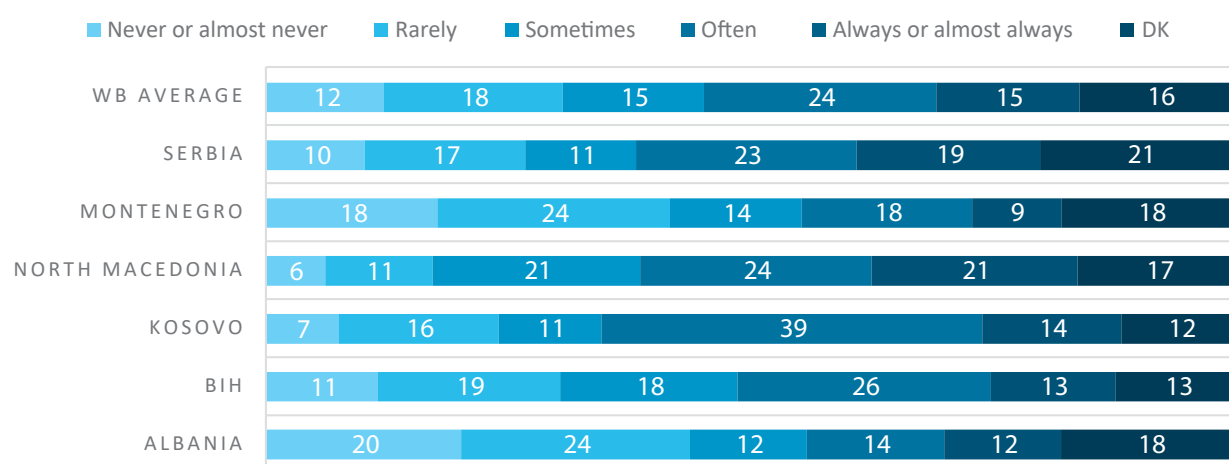
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3490 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

When asked how often employees hired on temporary bases are selected based on qualifications and skills, civil servants are divided. A third (33%) on average in the region believe that this is rarely or never the case, whereas slightly more states that this is often or always the case (35%). The most negative views are held by civil servants in Kosovo (65% responding never or rarely), while the most positive views are held by Montenegrin civil servants (54% responding with often and always).

Furthermore, more civil servants consider that formal rules for temporary hiring are often or always, rather than never or rarely, applied in practice. This is a positive change compared to the previous monitoring cycle, in which the figures were reversed. It is important to note that there is a fairly high volume of "don't know" responses, likely stemming from the fact that these "formal rules" are, at best, vague in most of WB administrations, if existent at all. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that respondents found this question difficult to answer.

Chart 19: Civil servants' perceptions on the statement "The formal rules for hiring people on a temporary basis are applied in practice" (%)
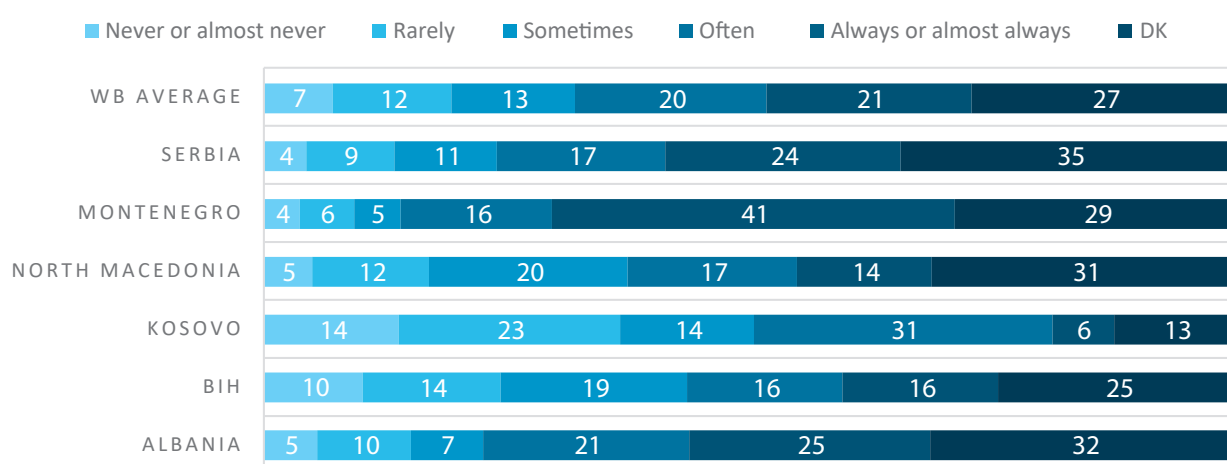
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3490 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Slightly less than a third of civil servants on average in the region (30%) feel that temporary contracts are often or always extended to over one year. Another 10% estimates that this happens sometimes (about half of the time). Civil servants in Kosovo and Serbia note this practice more frequently than others, with 60% and 48% respectively of the opinion that this happens often or always. Albanian civil servants, on the other hand, see this practice as the least present in their institutions, with 47% claiming that this never or rarely occurs. Responses from Montenegro represent the highest percentage of respondents who opted not to provide their opinions, at 43%.

Almost every third respondent (31%) across the region believes that individuals hired on temporary bases always or often go on to become civil servants after their temporary engagements. Less than a quarter thinks this happens rarely or never. In Albania, this practice appears least frequent as nearly a third of respondents (30%) note that it happens rarely or never, while 25% see it as a regular practice. At the same time, 30% did not provide an opinion, the regional highest on this point. The highest perceived frequency of this practice is in Montenegro, with 45% of respondents believing that temporary employees often or always go on to become civil servants after their temporary contracts expire. The high share of respondents region-wide who perceive these distortions of temporary hiring into the civil service system suggest that such practices are rather common and widely present in the administrations.

Overall, the values for this indicator show that Albania and North Macedonia have lower overall scores compared to PAR Monitor 2017/2018. By contrast, the situation in Kosovo has improved somewhat, and the scores for the remaining administrations have remained unchanged. In part, changes in Albania and North Macedonia come from the fact that WeBER's analytical approach to the complex legislative solutions has been slightly amended in this monitoring cycle.[73] Finally, higher scores in Kosovo are a result of an improved perception of civil servants; namely, somewhat greater number of civil servants perceive that temporary engagements in the administration are an exception rather than a rule.

Graph 9: Indicator values for PSHRM_P2_I2 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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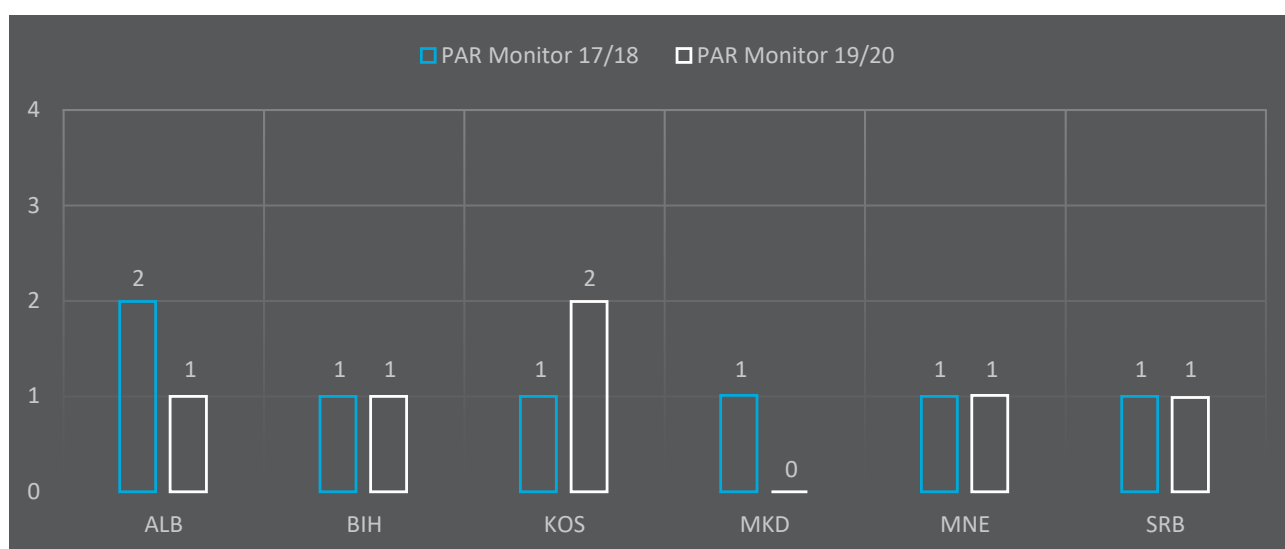
73   For Albania, interns were initially covered in assessment of Element 2 of this indicator but this has since been modified. With regards to North Macedonia, the problem lies in the prevalence of employment via agencies for temporary employment, as these do not announce competitions publicly which limits transparency, and which was clarified in this monitoring cycle.

PRINCIPLE 3: THE RECRUITMENT OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IS BASED ON MERIT AND EQUAL TREATMENT IN ALL ITS PHASES; THE CRITERIA FOR DEMOTION AND TERMINATION OF PUBLIC SERVANTS ARE EXPLICIT

Regarding the recruitment of civil servants, WeBER uses the indicator "Openness, transparency and fairness of recruitment into the civil service" (PSHRM_P3_I1). The focus here is on external recruitment processes (such as public competitions for vacancies), rather than on internal mobility procedures.

Table 20: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P3_I1 "Openness, transparency and fairness of recruitment into the civil service"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Information about public competitions is made broadly publicly available	4	2	4	2	4	2	2
E2. Public competition announcements are written in a simple, clear and understandable language	4	2	4	2	2	2	0
E3. During the public competition procedure, interested candidates can request and obtain clarifications, which are made publicly available	4	0	0	2	0	2	2
E4. There are no unreasonable barriers for external candidates which make public competitions more easily accessible to internal candidates	2	2	0	2	0	2	0
E5. The application procedure imposes minimum administrative and paperwork burden on candidates	4	2	0	0	0	0	4
E6. Candidates are allowed and invited to supplement missing documentation within a reasonable timeframe	4	2	0	0	0	0	0
E7. Decisions of the selection panels are made publicly available, with due respect to the protection of personal information	4	2	2	2	2	0	2
E8. Information about annulled announcements is made publicly available, with reasoning provided	2	0	4	2	0	2	0
E9. Civil servants perceive the recruitments into the civil service as based on merit	2	1	0	0	0	1	1
E10. Civil servants perceive the recruitment procedure to ensure equal opportunity	2	2	1	1	1	2	2
E11. The public perceives the recruitments done through the public competition process as based on merit	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Total points	**36**	**15**	**15**	**14**	**9**	**14**	**14**
Indicator value 2019/2020[74]	**0-5**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**2**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	2	2	1	1	1

All public administrations in the region put effort into announcing civil-service vacancies nationwide. Although vacancy announcements can reach broad audiences, recruitment procedures themselves are not so simple, especially for external candidates who have no prior knowledge in how the administration works.

Most administrations in the region disseminate public announcements through at least one nationwide channel. BIH and North Macedonia stand out in this regard as, in addition to featuring on the website of competent agencies, announcements are published in daily newspapers. In general, institutions have not yet

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74 Conversion of points: 0-6 points = 0; 7-12 points = 1; 13-18 points = 2; 19-24 points = 3; 25-30 points = 4; 31-36 points = 5.

taken full advantage of social media for advertising recruitment competitions, but tend to use more traditional means in disseminating their vacancy announcements (websites, portals, and bulletins).

Analysis of the "user-friendliness" of the language of vacancy announcements reveals that such efforts are limited. In BIH, such texts are made clear and simple, whereas in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, the standard of clarity is met, but the requirement of using simple terms less so. Competition announcements of Serbian administration have more shortcomings, being assessed as insufficiently clear and employing overly bureaucratic language.

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Good practices: User-friendly approaches in recruitment

The good practices identified in the previous PAR Monitor regarding the user-friendly approaches of the Department of Public Administration in **Albania** and the Civil Service Agency of **BIH** to assist applicants in applying for jobs in public administration persist. User-friendly video tutorials explaining application and selection procedures in detail in a simple manner, and free e-learning courses exist for interested candidates, helping them to successfully navigate application and selection procedures. A new good practice related to user-friendly approaches in recruitment has been established by the **Serbian** Human Resource Management Service, which now uses a Viber group as well as its Facebook page to share information about announced competitions.

</div>

Furthermore, only in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia are candidates provided with clear contact points for each vacancy announcement – meaning a reference person to ask for additional information on a given vacancy. An important deficiency in all three cases, however, is that replies to questions for clarification are not made publicly available at a clearly designated online location, so other prospective candidates cannot access them. Regarding equal opportunities for external candidates, there are some requirements which pose unreasonable barriers and give internal candidates an advantage. Most frequently, this is the requirement to pass a state exam before one can apply for a job, or as part of application procedures (in BIH for all positions and in Serbia for SCS), often within short deadlines.

With regards to how burdensome application procedures are in terms of required application documentation, the only two administrations that meet the criteria for point allocation are Albania (with the criteria partially met) and Serbia (fully met). This is an improvement compared to 2017/18 monitoring cycle in which no administration received points in this regard. The major improvement in the Serbian case comes from the fact that the application process is now organised in multiple stages, whereby candidates only have to submit application forms in the first stage and (certified copies of) documents come later, for candidates who make it to further rounds. As for Albania, the competition process is organised in 2 phases, but all required documents for a given vacancy have to be submitted in the first phase. This problem is also present in all other cases in the region: already in the first application stage applicants are often required to submit more than five different types of documents. Except for in Albania, no public administration allows candidates to supplement missing documentation during the application procedures, rather clearly stipulating that incomplete applications will be automatically rejected/dismissed.

When it comes to the transparency of the decisions of selection committees in recruitment processes, such decisions are generally made publicly available, but only partial information is provided. For instance, only the names of successful candidates are generally published, but with no reasoning provided regarding the selection procedure or any similar information. The exception, in a negative sense, is Montenegro where no documents with regards to the decisions or reasoning of selection panels are made publicly available whatsoever (and nor there are legal obligations to do so).

Transparency also suffers for the most part in cases of the annulment or cancellation of recruitment procedures. Three administrations do not publicly announce such decisions: Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The other three do publish information on annulments, albeit with varying levels of detail and quality. The novelty is that, unlike in the 2018/19 monitoring cycle, public administration in Montenegro now does publish this

information but does not provide proper justification. In Kosovo, justification is occasionally included in the decisions, while in BIH the provision of proper justification of annulment is a regular part of published decisions.

Civil servants' perceptions of the relevance of merit in recruitment processes are predominantly negative with the exceptions of Albania and Montenegro. In BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia around 50% of respondents disagree with the statement that in their institutions civil servants are recruited on the basis of qualifications and skills. When the question is inversed, meaning when asked if it is necessary to have personal and political connections to get civil service positions in their institutions, almost half of respondents on average in the region (36%) agree that this is the case. Perceptions of the necessity of connections are highest in Kosovo (67%) and BIH (57%) and lowest in Montenegro (27%). Albania is another country in which more respondents disagree (47%) than agree (27%) that it is necessary to have connections to get civil service positions.

Chart 20: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "To get a civil service job in my institution, one needs to have connections" (%)
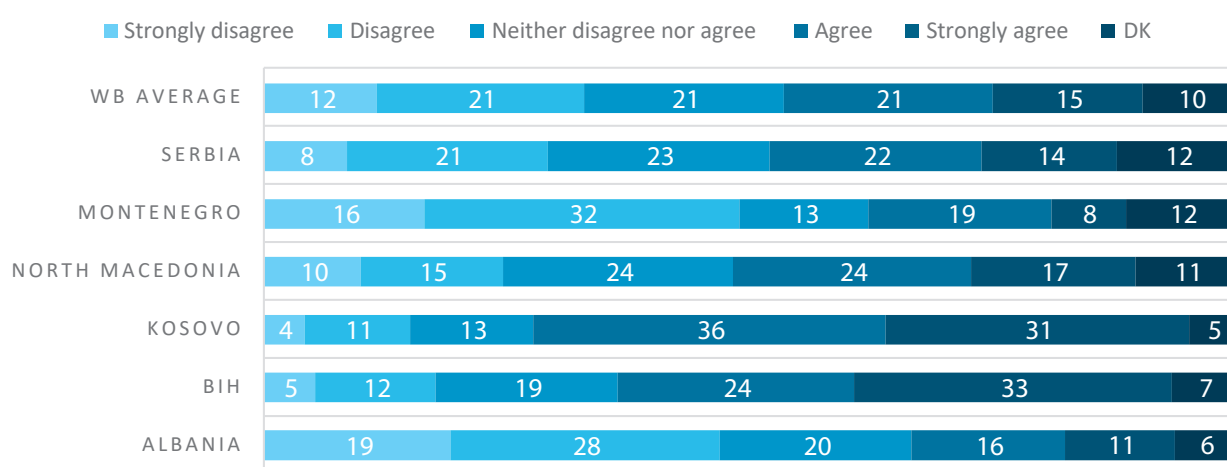
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither disagree nor agree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	12	21	21	21	15	10
SERBIA	8	21	23	22	14	12
MONTENEGRO	16	32	13	19	8	12
NORTH MACEDONIA	10	15	24	24	17	11
KOSOVO	4	11	13	36	31	5
BIH	5	12	19	24	33	7
ALBANIA	19	28	20	16	11	6

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3827 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

The general public is even more negative than civil servants are regarding perceptions about merit-based recruitment in public administration. The most positive perceptions are found in Kosovo, where 39% agree or strongly agree that public servants are recruited through public competitions based on merit. In BIH citizens provided the most negative responses, with only 9% agreeing with this statement. The percent of citizens disagreeing peaks at 86% in BIH, closely followed by North Macedonia (74%) and Serbia (63%).

Chart 21: Public perceptions on the question "Public servants are recruited through public competitions based on merit (i.e. best candidates are enabled to get the jobs)" (%)
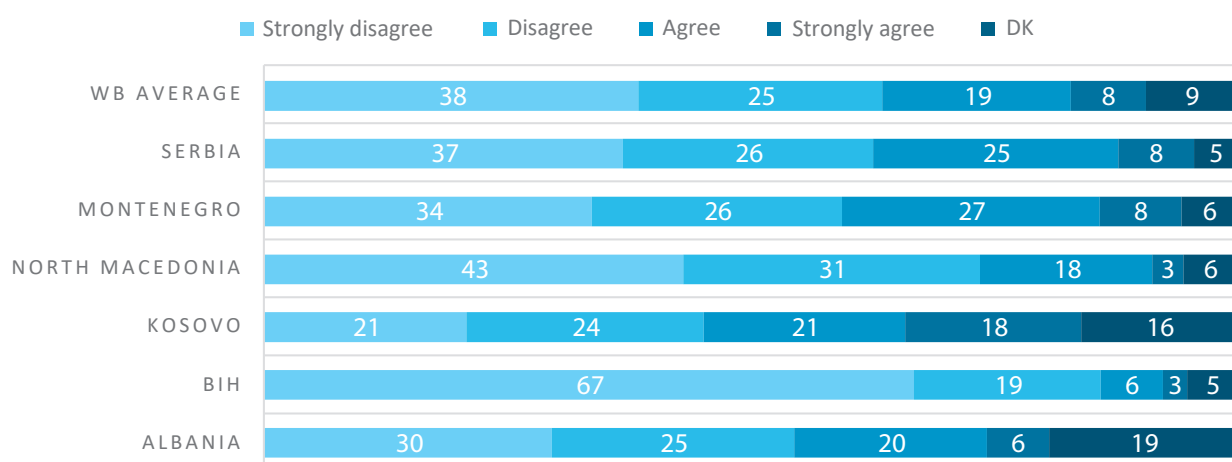
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	38	25	19	8	9
SERBIA	37	26	25	8	5
MONTENEGRO	34	26	27	8	6
NORTH MACEDONIA	43	31	18	3	6
KOSOVO	21	24	21	18	16
BIH	67	19	6	3	5
ALBANIA	30	25	20	6	19

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

When asked whether recruitment procedures in their institutions ensure the equal treatment of all candidates (regardless of gender, ethnicity or other personal traits which could be the basis for unfair discrimination), two groups emerge. On the one hand, in the cases where there are no requirements for employment based on ethnic lines (Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia), the prevailing view is that procedures are not discriminatory. On the other hand, in the cases with multi-ethnic compositions and constitutional requirements for ethnic representation in civil service (BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia), responses to this question are more negative, with roughly around 50% of respondents in each case disagreeing that candidates are treated equally.

Chart 22: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "In the recruitment procedure for civil servants in my institution all candidates are treated equally" (%)

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither disagree nor agree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	13	19	12	28	23	5
SERBIA	6	12	12	35	26	8
MONTENEGRO	4	10	8	30	41	7
NORTH MACEDONIA	16	26	13	26	14	4
KOSOVO	23	31	12	19	11	4
BIH	24	25	16	20	11	3
ALBANIA	5	9	10	39	34	4
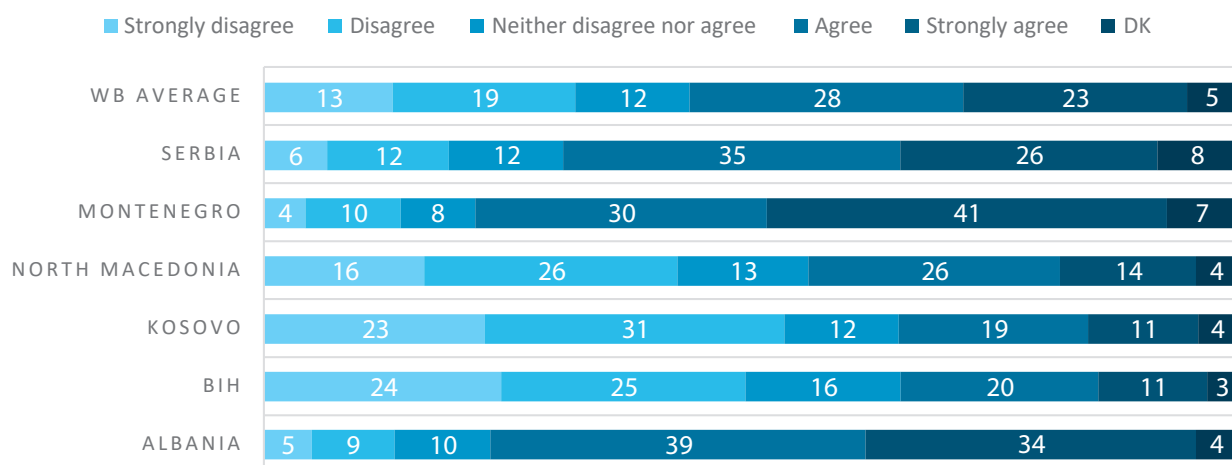
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3827 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Overall, Montenegro and Serbia show some improvement in this indicator, mainly due to efforts to make public competition announcements or application processes more user-friendly and accessible to the public. Similarly, civil servants have expressed slightly more positive opinions on the merit-based nature of the civil service than in the previous monitoring cycle. In the remaining four administrations, indicator values remain the same as in the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor.

Graph 10: Indicator values for PSHRM_P3_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
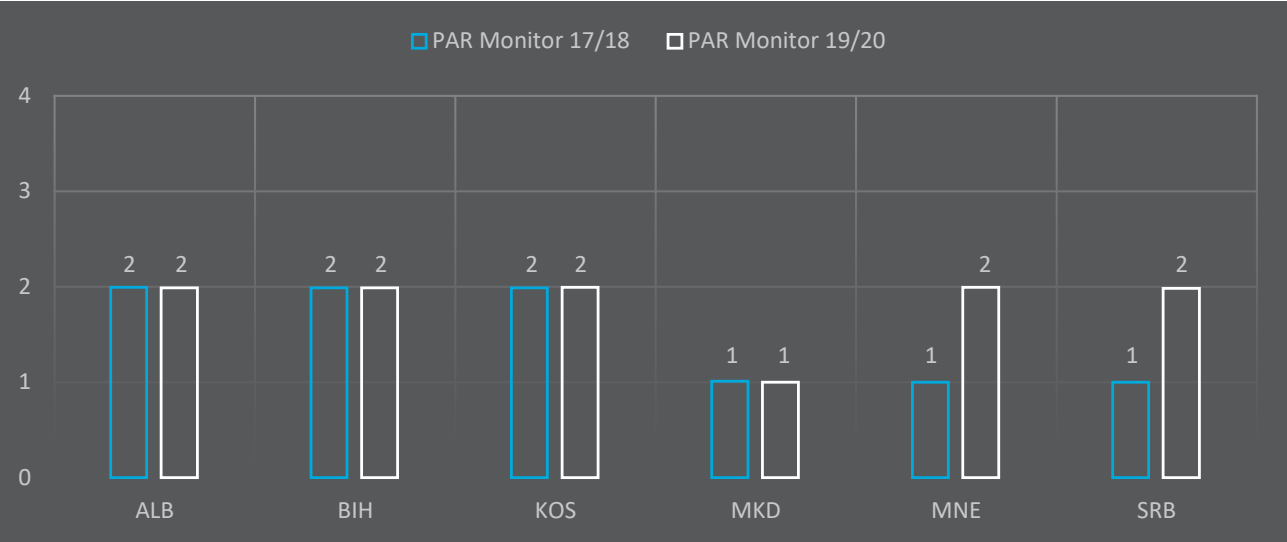
PRINCIPLE 4: DIRECT OR INDIRECT POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON SENIOR MANAGERIAL POSITIONS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IS PREVENTED

WeBER strives to provide a comprehensive measurement of the "Effectiveness of the protection of senior civil servants' positions from unwanted political interference" (Indicator PSHRM_P4_I1). It does so by combining SIGMA sub-indicators, legislation analysis, and information acquired from relevant institutions. All of this is then complemented by survey data (from both civil servants and CSOs).

Table 21: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P4_I1 "Effectiveness of protection of senior civil servants' position from unwanted political interference"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. The Law prescribes competitive, merit-based procedures for the selection of senior managers in the civil service	2	2	1	2	0	2	1
E2. The law prescribes objective criteria for the termination of employment of senior civil servants	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
E3. The merit-based recruitment of senior civil servants is efficiently applied in practice.	4	2	0	0	0	0	0
E4. Acting senior managers can by law, and are, only appointed from within the civil service ranks for a maximum period limited by the Law	4	0	0	2	0	0	0
E5. Ratio of eligible candidates per senior-level vacancy	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E6. Civil servants consider that the procedures for appointing senior civil servants ensure that the best candidates get the jobs	2	1	0	0	0	1	1
E7. CSOs perceive that the procedures for appointing senior civil servants ensure the best candidates get the jobs	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E8. Civil servants perceive that senior civil servants are appointed based on political support	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
E9. Existence of vetting or deliberation procedures on appointments of senior civil servants outside of the scope of the civil service legislation	2	2	2	2	0	0	0
E10. Civil servants consider that senior civil servants would not implement and can effectively reject illegal orders of political superiors	2	1	0	0	1	1	1
E11. Civil servants consider that senior civil service positions are not subject of political agreements and "divisions of the cake" among the ruling political parties	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
E12. Civil servants perceive that senior civil servants are not dismissed for political motives	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
E13. Civil servants consider the criteria for dismissal of senior public servants to be properly applied in practice	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
E14. CSOs consider senior managerial civil servants to be professionalised in practice	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E15. Civil servants perceive that senior civil servants do not participate in electoral campaigns of political parties	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
E16. Share of appointments without a competitive procedure (including acting positions outside of public service scope) out of the total number of appointments to senior managerial civil service positions	4	4	4	0	0	0	0
Total points	**40**	**18**	**10**	**6**	**2**	**8**	**4**
Indicator value 2019/2020[75]	**0-5**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**
Indicator value 2017/2018		3	1	1	0	1	0

When it comes to regulations for ensuring merit-based recruitment of SCS, WeBER researchers (based on SIGMA's Methodological Framework)[76] estimate that the most comprehensive legal frameworks are those in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. In addition, Albania and BIH have solid legal frameworks for dismissals, unlike the

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75   Conversion of points: 0-7 points = 0; 8-14 points = 1; 15-21 points = 2; 22-28 points = 3; 29-34 points = 4; 35-40 points = 5.

76   More specifically, SIGMA Sub-indicator 2 – "Adequacy of the legislative framework for merit-based recruitment for senior civil service positions", Sub-indicator 3 – "Objectivity of criteria for termination of employment of senior civil servants in the legislative framework" and Sub-indicator 5 – "Application in practice of recruitment procedures for the senior civil service" of the Indicator 3.4.1 – "Merit-based recruitment and dismissal of senior civil servants". See: SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", op. cit.

other public administrations. Albania's administration is the only one with points regarding efficient application of merit-based recruitment procedures in practice. Even in this case, however, missing data prevented the assessment of some aspects, such as whether selection committees were adequately trained or whether the highest-ranked candidates were appointed in the end.

A major problem factoring into the politicisation of the SCS is the appointment of acting managers into vacant positions, which is often misused for political appointments, but is not present in all WB administrations. Kosovo is the case in which the civil service law regulates the institute of acting managers more strictly than in other administrations, with a maximum duration of such appointments (3 months) and the limitation that such appointments can only be made from within the ranks of the civil service. Moreover, civil service law in Kosovo precisely defines the rules on the exact lower ranking positions from which such appointments can be made. The new civil service law in Montenegro takes a step in a similar direction, yet in far less precise terms than in Kosovo. In this case, appointments of acting managers are possible from any government institution and in cases in which no suitable candidates can be found, it is also possible to appoint individuals from outside the civil service system. In Albania, the Law on the Organisation of the State Administration[77] allows for appointments of acting managers, but it confines such appointments to from within the civil service and prescribes the criteria needed for civil servants to be assigned acting positions. Although it does not place limits on the durations of such appointments, the law requires that civil servants who are assigned acting positions hold civil service positions that are directly subordinate to those which they are temporarily assigned in "acting" capacities.[78] In BIH, the Council of Ministers appoints acting managers through very unclear procedures and criteria, and in Serbia, the numerous appointments of acting managers – in open breach of civil service law (CSL) limitations – have become one of the most notorious problems in PAR.

> ## Practices to avoid: Government in open breach of CSL
>
> Since the adoption of the CSL in 2005 in **Serbia**, only up to 30% of all senior positions were appointed on the basis of competitions, irrespective of the government in power. In order to overcome this problem in a legal sense, the CSL was amended in 2014 to allow for acting managers to occupy vacant senior positions with a limited mandate of six months (within the option of exceptional extensions for another three months). Since this amendment, appointments of acting managers into vacant SCS positions have become a standard practice, instead of an exception. A new amendment followed in 2018 to further limit the growing prevalence of acting heads (among other changes) by prescribing, for example, that only existing civil servants can be appointed as acting heads. The practical application of the law has nevertheless not yielded improvements, and, in fact, the degree of law breach has become more serious. As determined by the European Commission, the government has continued to appoint non-civil servants on acting bases and the limits of term duration continue to be misused, representing a serious concern.[79]

In addition to the selection and appointment procedures prescribed by civil service legislation, some governments in the region use additional formalised political vetting procedures outside of the scope of civil service law and its bylaws. More specifically, in Montenegro and Serbia, government rules of procedure prescribe that government committees/commissions (working bodies consisting of ministers or other high-level officials) discuss and propose all appointment decisions, including those of SCS, to the government. This means that once selection and nomination procedures prescribed by civil service legislation are completed, additional deliberation on the proposed candidates takes place and can effectively result in further political manipulation related to SCS appointments. In North Macedonia, there are no additional vetting or deliberation procedures, but the appointments to the "A category" (state secretaries), have been highly politicised. In BIH, selection committees propose lists of all candidates who have successfully passed relevant tests to hiring authorities. Authorities than have the discretionary power to select any of the shortlisted candidates, and if they fail to do so within 30 days, the Civil Service Agency appoints the most successful candidate ex officio. In Albania and Kosovo there are no additional vetting processes, although in Kosovo there exists the possibility of not hiring the best ranked candidate (but in this case justification needs to be provided).

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77 Law on the Organisation and Functioning of the State Administration, no. 90/2012, https://bit.ly/3aPXJmt (last accessed 10 April 2021).

78 The secretary general position can be temporarily assigned to a director general and the director general position can be assigned to one of the subordinate directors.

79 European Commission, Serbia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6 October 2020, p. 16, https://bit.ly/2Sg0d79 (last accessed 20 April 2021).

Analysis of the share of appointments to senior civil service positions without competitive procedures within a one-year period (from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019) reveals substantial differences among the administrations. Whereas no SCS appointments were made without prior competitions in Albania, as much as 94% of appointments in this period in Serbia were based on provisions for appointing acting managers rather than selecting them on competitive bases, creating a situation in which two thirds of all SCS are in acting status.

Table 22: Appointments to SCS in WB administrations in the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019[80]

	ALB	BIH	KOS[81]	MKD	MNE	SRB
Share of uncompetitive appointments	0%	0%	/	100%	68%	94%
Total number of appointments to SCS positions	118	9	/	N/A	165	624

The prevailing perception of civil servants is that appointments to SCS positions are often not merit-based, with 42% on average at the regional level disagreeing that the best candidates get the jobs. Looking at data on the national level, there is a substantial contrast between the figures from two groups of administrations: North Macedonia, Kosovo, and BIH on the one hand, where the level of agreement with this statement does not exceed 20%, and Albania and Montenegro on the other, where approximately 50% of civil servants in each case agree with the statement. Serbia's results fall in between these two groups, with roughly a third of respondents agreeing and around the same number disagreeing when asked whether appointments to SCS positions are merit-based.

Asked if SCS in their institutions would implement illegal actions if political superiors asked them to do so, civil servants in Kosovo show the highest percentage of agreement (45%). On the other end, in Montenegro, only 9% agree. It is important to note that, on average, 25% of respondents in the region chose "don't know". This draws attention to the sensitivity of this question, and the findings are very similar to those of the 2017/18 monitoring cycle in this regard.

Chart 23: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "In my institution, senior civil servants would implement illegal actions if political superiors asked them to do so" (%)
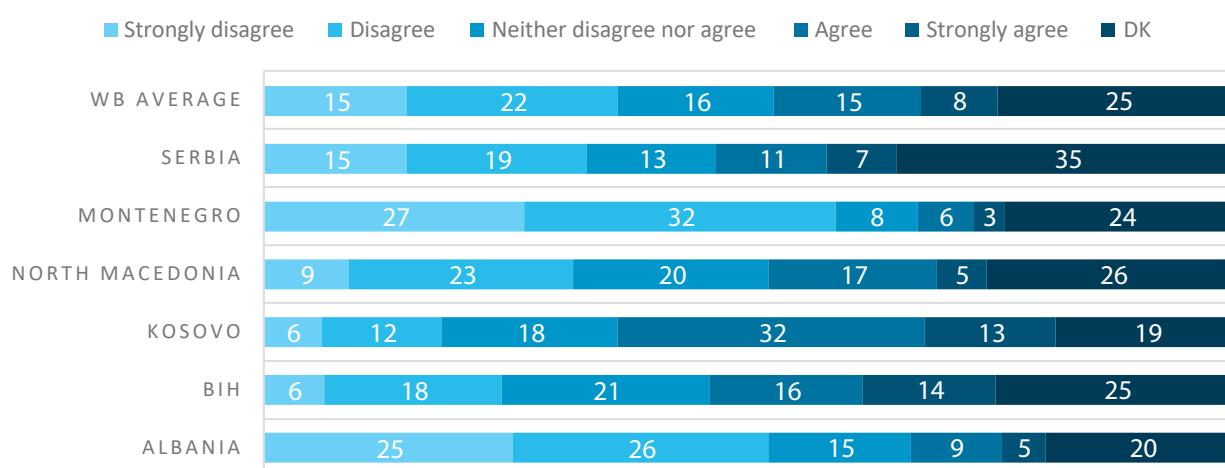
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3229 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

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80   Based on the individual national-level scoring sheets produced in the monitoring process.
81   No data was found for Kosovo because WeBER researchers did not receive answers to FOI requests.

Additionally, when asked if SCS positions are subject to political agreements and "divisions of the cake" among ruling political parties, slightly less than half of civil servants on average across the region consider that this is the case (45%). This is somewhat less than in baseline measurements, when on average 51% held the same opinion. Furthermore, the figures are the highest in BIH, at 67%. By contrast, the most positive view on this question is held by Albanian civil servants, more than two thirds of whom consider that political parties do not distribute SCS positions politically.

Similar to 2017/18's findings, slightly over half of respondents (52%) in the region consider that SCS are at least in part appointed thanks to political support often or always. When the "sometimes (about half of the time)" option is added to this, two thirds of respondents hold this view. The most widespread perception of politicisation is held by civil servants in Kosovo (69%) and BIH (68%), followed by North Macedonia (60%). The most positive views are expressed by Albanian respondents, where positive and negative perceptions are balanced at around a third.

Another sensitive question, for which approximately a third of respondents region-wide (34%) refused to state their opinions, is the question on how frequently SCS participate in the electoral campaigns of political parties during elections. Those who refused were more than 40% in BIH and Serbia, and slightly below 40% in Albania and Montenegro. The shares of "always" and "often" responses vary; in Kosovo and North Macedonia they are higher than in other parts of the region, while in Albania and Montenegro over 40% of respondents say that SCS never or rarely take part in electoral campaigns.

Chart 24: Civil servants' perceptions on the statement "In my institution, senior civil servants participate in electoral campaigns of political parties during elections" (%)
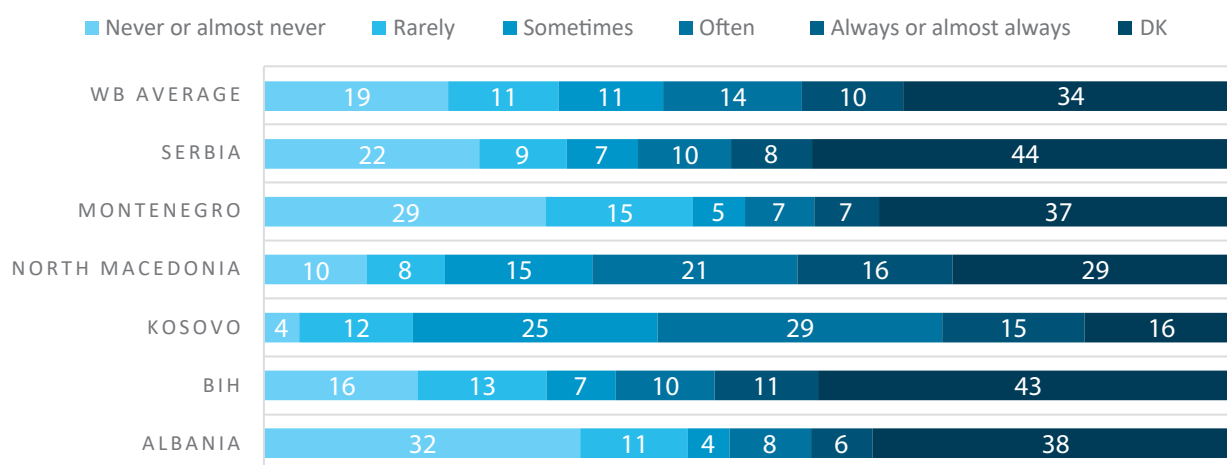
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3229 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Civil society organisations were also asked their opinions about whether senior managerial civil servants are professional in practice (rather than political favourites). An overwhelming majority of 73% of CSO representatives region-wide believe that civil servants are not professional in practice, representing the exact same share of answers as in baseline measurement. This perception is consistently negative across the region, with the only exceptions being found in Albania and North Macedonia where there is a considerable portion of respondents who chose to stay neutral (41% and 34% respectively). Interestingly, not a single respondent from Serbia sees SCS as professionals in this country. Finally, CSO representatives across the region express similarly negative views when asked whether procedures for appointing SCS ensure that the best candidates get the jobs: 78% disagree region-wide, with most negative opinions (89%) recorded in Montenegro.

Overall, in four out of six administrations, the situation in the region has remained the same as in the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor for this indicator. Albania and Kosovo have, however, each lost one point in their indicator value scale as a result of somewhat more negative perception of CSO representatives regarding the merit-based nature of SCS recruitment.

Graph 11: Indicator values for PSHRM_P4_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
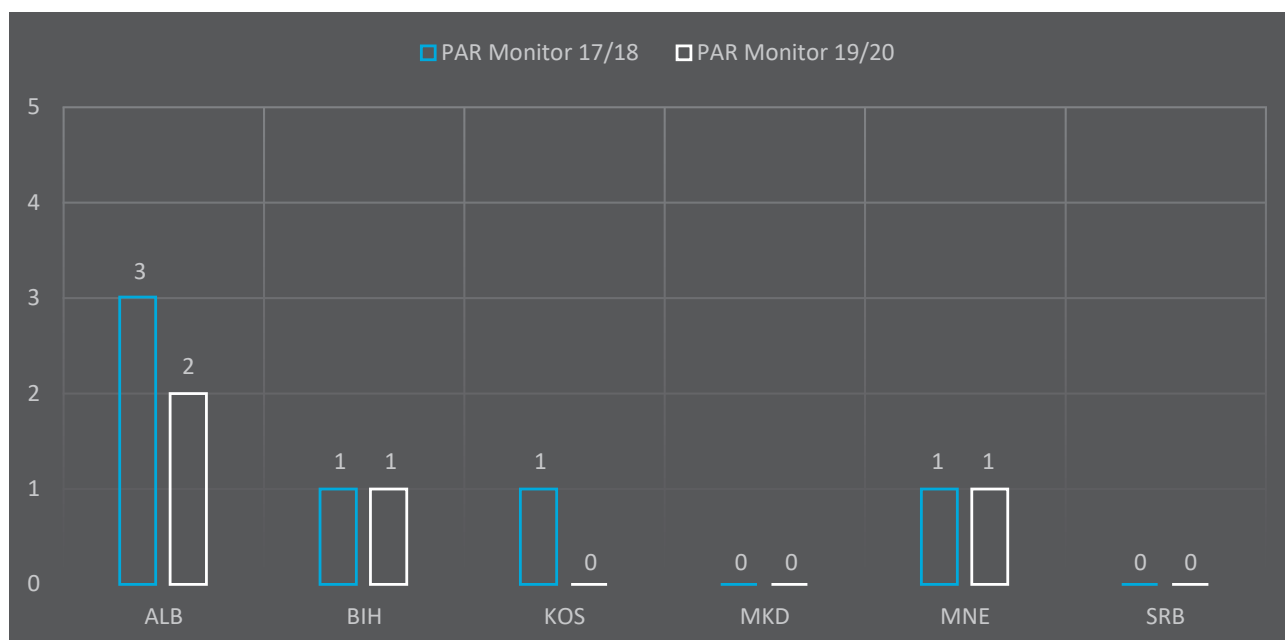
PRINCIPLE 5: THE REMUNERATION SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IS BASED ON THE JOB CLASSIFICATION; IT IS FAIR AND TRANSPARENT

Regarding remuneration systems for civil servants, WeBER monitors the "Transparency, clarity and public availability of information on the civil service remuneration system". Indicator PSHRM_P5_I1 consists of six elements.

Table 23: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P5_I1 "Transparency, clarity and public availability of information on the civil service remuneration system"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. The civil service remuneration system is simply structured	4	2	4	0	4	2	2
E2. The civil service salary/remuneration system foresees limited and clearly defined options for salary supplements additional to the basic salary	4	4	0	0	2	2	4
E3. Information on civil service remuneration system is available online	6	4	4	0	4	2	2
E4. Citizen friendly explanations or presentations of the remuneration information are available online	2	0	1	0	1	0	0
E5. Discretionary supplements are limited by legislation and cannot comprise a major part of a civil servant's salary/remuneration	4	4	2	0	2	2	4
E6. Civil servants consider the discretionary supplements to be used for their intended objective of stimulating and awarding performance, rather than for political or personal favouritism	2	1	0	0	0	1	1
Total points	**22**	**15**	**11**	**0**	**13**	**9**	**13**
Indicator value 2019/2020[82]	**0-5**	**3**	**2**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**3**
Indicator value 2017/2018		3	1	0	3	1	2

A simple and clear-cut structure for remuneration system is one of the first preconditions for transparency. Put differently, such system allows the public to understand how much civil servants at different stages of their careers earn. The simplicity of the structures here means that all elements of the salary structures are defined in the legislation, including their concrete values. In most administrations in the region, the salaries comprise a base and a multiplier (coefficient), the multiplication of which provides a basic salary. In North Macedonia, the system is slightly different, with salary components expressed in points (which are awarded for education, position level supplement and working experience) and the Law on Administrative Servants defines how the value of points is determined.

Remuneration systems in BIH (state level institutions) and North Macedonia were assessed as simply structured, because all the necessary salary components are prescribed clearly in primary legislation. Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia's systems are partially simply structured, which means that despite fairly simple legal frameworks, there are deficiencies which decrease transparency. More specifically, in Albania the basic salary is simply structured, but rules and regulations for calculating supplements are not. In Montenegro, there are exceptions to the legally prescribed salary coefficients (such as those for "exceptional staff") which are defined rather vaguely in legislation. The problem in Serbia is that although the Law on Salaries of Civil Servants prescribes a unified base pay for all civil servants, annual budget laws for 2019 and 2020 recognise several different base pays for civil servants in different institutions, which makes the system fragmented. The system in Kosovo is still completely decentralised, with each ministry defining its own salaries based on internal regulations.

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82   Conversion of points: 0-3 points = 0; 4-7 points = 1; 8-11 points = 2; 12-15 points =3; 16-19 points = 4; 20-22 points = 5.

Although there was an attempt to regulate this matter in a comprehensive manner by the adoption of the new Law on Salaries in the Public Sector in 2019, this piece of legislation was annulled by the Constitutional Court. Further attempts to implement the law on salaries which is formally in place have failed.

> ### Practices to avoid: Perpetual postponing of the application of a new remuneration system
>
> In **Serbia**, a new remuneration system in the public sector was supposed to be introduced in 2015. Following the adoption of an umbrella Law on the Salary System in the Public Sector in 2016, a new Law on the Salaries of Civil Servants was to be introduced as one of the special laws. The new system was going to introduce an equal base pay and a unique system of coefficients across the public sector, ensuring the wide-ranging application of the principle of "equal pay for equal work". Yet, the installation of the new system has been repeatedly postponed – most recently until the beginning of 2022. Such an approach to reforms should be avoided, as it creates legal uncertainty and undermines their overall momentum, showing that changes can often remain simply on paper, despite the spending of considerable resources and the raising of expectations (or fears) of many individuals within the system.

An important component of the remuneration system are the supplements to the basic salary, which are based on a number of criteria such as overtime work, work on holidays, work in extreme or dangerous conditions, and others. WeBER examines whether these supplements are clearly defined in legislation, including whether there are rules on how different supplements are combined and which of them are mutually exclusive. Albanian and Serbian laws on salaries are the only ones in the region with clear legal provisions which limit the amounts and the use of salary supplements and with rules on how they can be combined. The North Macedonian law, in addition to failing to fully regulate the mutual exclusiveness of supplements, also does not provide an upper limit for a type of supplement described as market adjustment supplements. The Montenegrin law also neglects mutual exclusivity between supplements, leaves some supplements quite unclear (the supplement for work in "certain job positions", for instance), and makes their further regulation subject to other legislative documents (such as collective bargaining agreements).
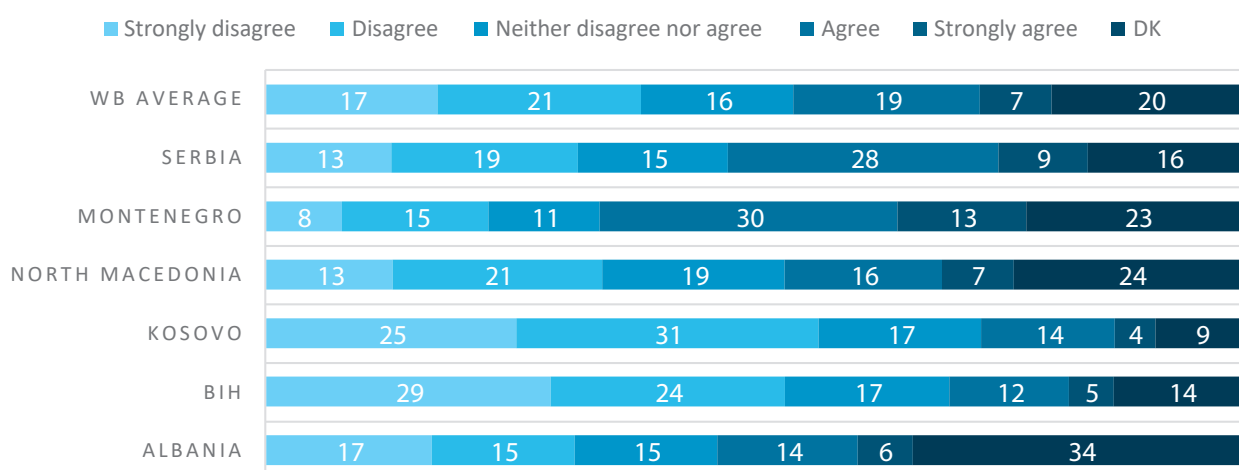
Performance-related elements of pay can be a stimulating tool for managers, but unless their use is very clearly limited and carefully done, can also distort the transparency and predictability of overall remuneration systems for civil servants. WeBER researchers utilise SIGMA's assessment methodology to monitor the use of bonuses (or other performance-based pay tools),[83] and complement this methodology with the perceptions of civil servants. Albania and Serbia score the highest as the laws regulating salaries of civil servants in these two administrations do not envisage the awarding of bonuses.[84] Bonuses do however exist in BIH's and North Macedonia's state administrations, and it is found that legislation in these cases contains clear and non-discriminatory criteria for allocating them, but no data was available to confirm that administrations in practice apply the legally prescribed limit of 20% of bonuses in total remuneration. As for Montenegro, legally defined criteria for allocating bonuses are assessed as broad enough to leave space for managerial discretion. Finally, not enough data was available for Kosovo to assess this element.

Civil servants' perceptions regarding the use of bonuses in their institutions, however, in some cases differ from expert assessments. Namely, civil servants were asked first how often bonuses or increases in salary grades/steps are used in their institution to stimulate and reward performance and, second, if they agree that political and personal connections help employees to receive bonuses or increases in pay grades. On average, 38% of respondents in the region disagree that in their institutions managers use bonuses to reward performance, while only 26% agree with the statement. This is a somewhat higher level of agreement than in the survey results from 2017/18 monitoring cycle (18%). The highest level of disagreement is recorded in Kosovo (56%), while the lowest is found in Montenegro (23%). On the second question, 32% of respondents on average reply that political and personal connections "often" or "always" help civil servants receive bonuses, whereas less than a third (32%) say that this happens "never" or "rarely".

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83   SIGMA's indicator 3.5.1, "Fairness and competitiveness of the remuneration system for civil servants", sub-indicator 6, "Managerial Discretion in the Allocation of Bonuses". See: SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", op. cit.

84   Exceptional cases in Serbia relate to the Tax Administration and the Administration for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions, which clearly regulate awarding of bonuses.

Chart 25: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "In my institution, bonuses or increases in pay grades are used by managers only to stimulate or reward performance" (%)


Legend: Strongly disagree · Disagree · Neither disagree nor agree · Agree · Strongly agree · DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	17	21	16	19	7	20
SERBIA	13	19	15	28	9	16
MONTENEGRO	8	15	11	30	13	23
NORTH MACEDONIA	13	21	19	16	7	24
KOSOVO	25	31	17	14	4	9
BIH	29	24	17	12	5	14
ALBANIA	17	15	15	14	6	34

Note*: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 2781 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Finally, WeBER researchers again used SIGMA's assessment methodology to perform their own calculation regarding the sub-indicator on the public availability of information about remuneration systems.[85] The research confirms that information on salaries is easily available in Albania, BIH and North Macedonia, albeit with differences in the types of information provided. For instance, administrations in BIH and North Macedonia, are the only two that publish information on offered salaries in job announcements for civil servants, while only in Albania is the information on average total salaries of civil servants publicly available online. With regards to Montenegro and Serbia, the only piece of salary information that can be easily found online relates to general information on salary levels for civil servants. Information on civil service remuneration system in Kosovo is not easily available online.

In this indicator, an improvement is observed in BIH, Montenegro, and Serbia. Each administration achieved one point more in the overall indicator value compared to the 2017/2018 monitoring. The differences in BIH and Montenegro stem from WeBER's finding that these administrations publish some pieces of salary information related to the state administration. In Serbia, the difference results from the fact that civil servants' perception has improved, and that WeBER monitoring did not identify the existence of bonuses in the law regulating salaries of civil servants.

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85   SIGMA's indicator 3.5.1, "Fairness and competitiveness of the remuneration system for civil servants", sub-indicator 3, "Availability of salary information". See: SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", op. cit.

Graph 12: Indicator values for PSHRM_P5_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
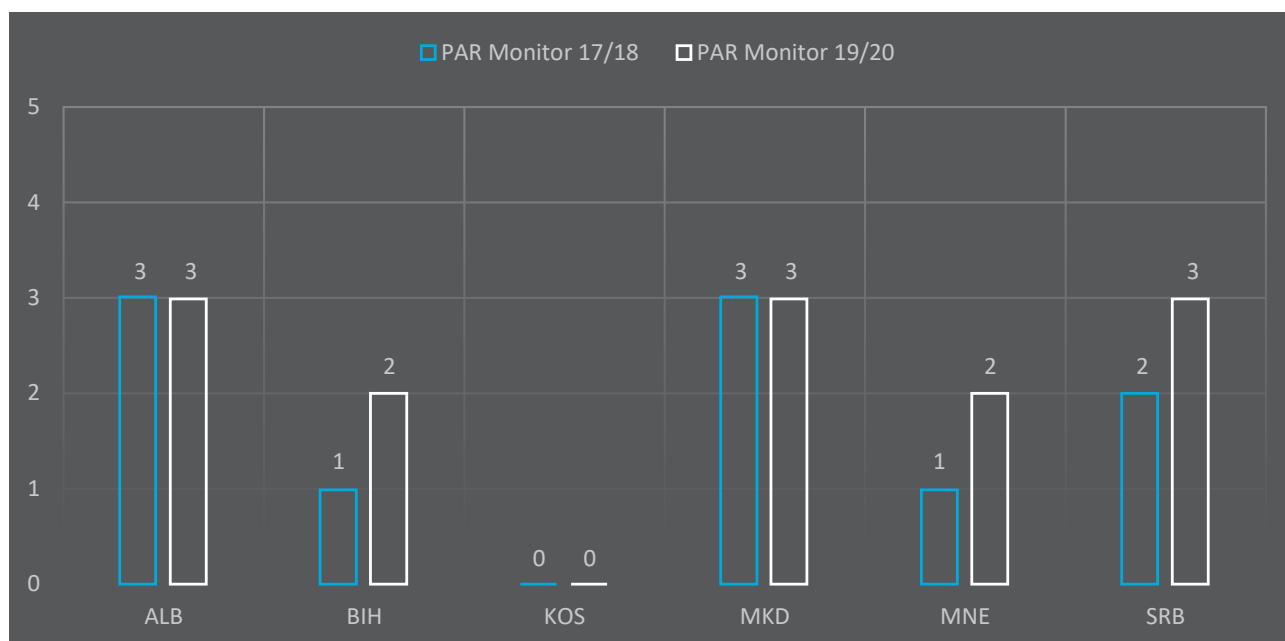
PRINCIPLE 7: MEASURES FOR PROMOTING INTEGRITY, PREVENTING CORRUPTION AND ENSURING DISCIPLINE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE ARE IN PLACE

While WeBER does not focus on disciplinary measures in civil service, it does measure the "Effectiveness of measures for the promotion of integrity and prevention of corruption in the civil service" through Indicator PSHRM_P7_I1.

Table 24: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PSHRM_P7_I1 "Effectiveness of measures for the promotion of integrity and prevention of corruption in the civil service"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Integrity and anti-corruption measures for the civil service are formally established in the central administration	4	2	0	4	4	2	2
E2. Integrity and anti-corruption measures for the civil service are implemented in central administration	4	2	0	2	2	2	2
E3. Civil servants consider the integrity and anti-corruption measures as effective	2	2	0	1	1	1	1
E4. CSOs consider the integrity and anti-corruption measures as effective	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E5. Civil servants consider that the integrity and anti-corruption measures are impartial	2	1	0	0	1	1	1
E6. CSOs consider that the integrity and anti-corruption measures in state administration are impartial	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E7. Civil servants feel they would be protected as whistle blowers	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**18**	**7**	**0**	**7**	**8**	**6**	**6**
Indicator value 2019/2020[86]	**0-5**	**2**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	0	1	1	1	2

86   Conversion of points: 0-3 points = 0; 4-6 points = 1; 7-9 points = 2; 10-12 points =3; 13-15 points = 4; 16-18 points = 5.

The first two indicator elements were calculated by WeBER researchers (based on SIGMA's Methodological Framework),[87] whereas the remaining five are measured through surveys of civil servants and civil society representatives.

Kosovo and North Macedonia have comprehensive integrity systems in terms of legislation and policy frameworks. Albania and Serbia score lower in the analysis done by WeBER researchers than they scored when SIGMA performed its analysis, with their major limitations being in the insufficient completeness of the legal framework for public sector integrity. Some shortcomings in Albania's legislation relate to the lack of restrictions for the secondary employment of civil servants and minimising of "revolving doors". In Serbia, the problem is insufficient regulation of the receipt of gifts and benefits on the one hand, and of fraud, deception, and corruption offences perpetrated by public officials on the other. Common elements of legal frameworks for public sector integrity across the entire region include obligations for SCS to disclose assets, whistle-blower protections for all public servants, as well as code of conduct and/or ethical guidelines for all public servants. On the other extreme, only in North Macedonia has illicit enrichment been criminalised.

With regards to the implementation of public sector integrity policy, only BIH does not meet the criteria for point allocation due to a lack of overall integrity policy for institutions at the state level, while public administrations in the remaining cases meet the criteria partially. For example, in Serbia, not all monitoring reports encompassing public sector integrity issues were found to be produced and published at least annually.

Low scores in this WeBER indicator are largely due to the negative perceptions of civil servants and, particularly, civil society, in relation to the functioning of the civil service integrity system. As part of the WeBER survey of civil servants, respondents were asked if integrity and anti-corruption measures in place in their institutions are effective in achieving their purpose. Region-wide, 40% of respondents agree while about a quarter of them disagree. With regards to national-level results, interesting variations can be noted. In Albania, 62% agree with the statement, while only 10% disagree. On the other hand, in Kosovo, perceptions of civil servants are equally divided between those who agree and those who disagree that mechanisms are effective (33% each). When CSOs are asked the same question, responses are considerably more negative. More precisely, nearly 70% of respondents on average see integrity and anti-corruption measures in the state administration as ineffective. Disagreement is highest in Montenegro (87%), followed by Serbia and BIH (76% and 75% respectively).

Civil servants were also asked about their opinion on the statement "Integrity and anti-corruption measures in place in my institution are impartial (applied to all civil servants in the same way)". While in Kosovo almost half of respondents disagreed (45%), only in Montenegro and Albania more than 50% agreed with the statement (59% in each). Once again, the same question yields far more negative responses when directed to CSOs, with an average of 76% region-wide disagreeing.

A particularly interesting result comes from answers to the question "If I were to become a whistle-blower, I would feel protected". Only 14% of civil servants on average region-wide claim they would feel protected, while nearly a half (45%) would not. A quarter of respondents on average opted for "don't know" in response to this question. The highest level of agreement is 21% in Albania, while the highest level of disagreement is found in BIH (60%). As in the previous monitoring cycle, respondents from Montenegro continue to give the highest number of "don't know" answers (slightly more than a third), which may suggest uneasiness towards this question's subject matter in the Montenegrin civil service, in spite of the fact that this was an anonymous online survey. Serbia and North Macedonia follow closely behind, with many civil servants refusing to reply to this question.

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87   For the first indicator element, WeBER combines two SIGMA sub-indicators of the SIGMA Indicator 3.7.2, "Integrity of public servants". Those are Sub-indicator 1 – "Completeness of the legal framework for public sector integrity" and Sub-indicator 2 – "Existence of a comprehensive public sector integrity policy and action plan. For the second indicator element, WeBER uses SIGMA Sub-indicator 3 (of the Indicator 3.7.2) – "Implementation of public sector integrity policy". See: SIGMA/OECD, "Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration", op. cit.

Chart 26: Civil servants' perceptions on the question "If I were to become a whistle-blower, I would feel protected" (%)
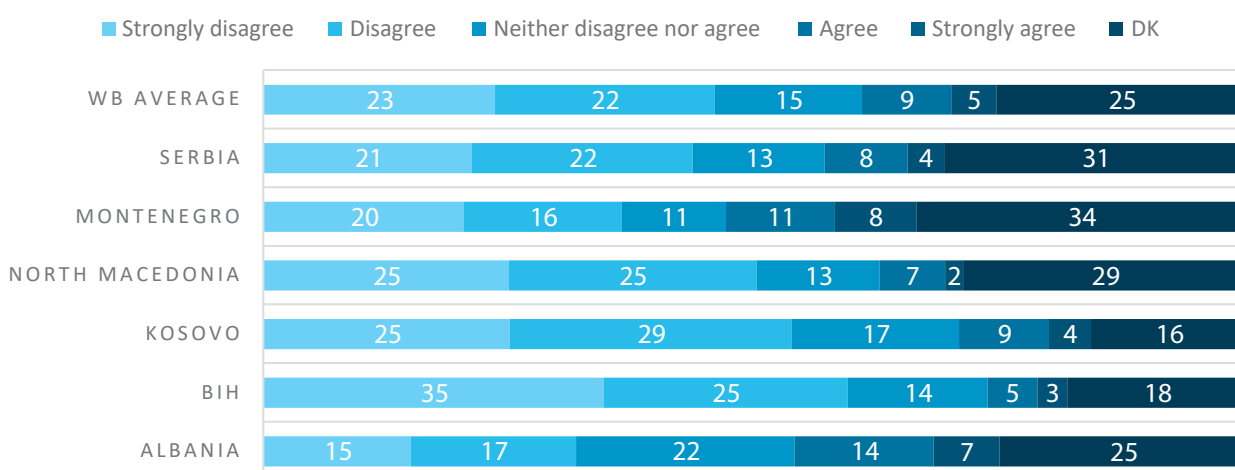
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3132 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Overall, indicator values for effectiveness of measures for the promotion of integrity and prevention of corruption in civil service improved for Kosovo and North Macedonia, while somewhat deteriorated in Serbia. What makes a difference in Serbia compared to the previous monitoring cycle (which partly utilised SIGMA's assessment) is that WeBER researchers have not found illicit enrichment to be criminalised in Serbian legislation and there is no maximum value threshold regarding the receipt of gifts and benefits applicable for all civil servants. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, change is reflected in that somewhat more civil servants consider integrity and anti-corruption measures as effective (both in Kosovo and North Macedonia) and impartial (North Macedonia).

Graph 13: Indicator values for PSHRM_P7_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
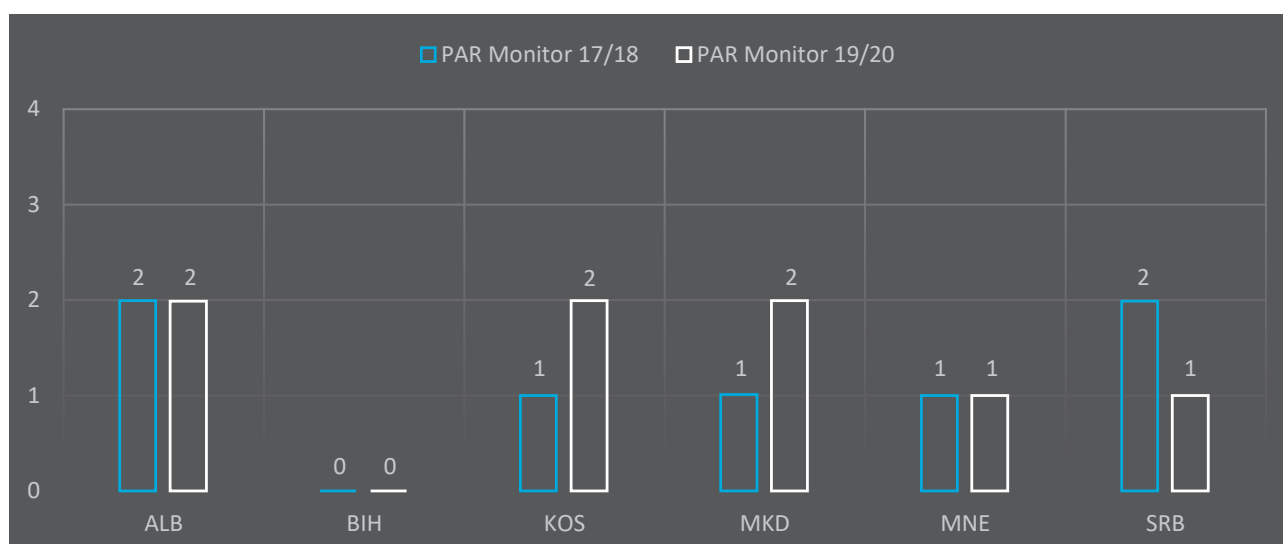
IV.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AREA

WeBER monitors five out of seven EU principles in this area. It focuses on public availability of information related to public service, hiring of temporary staff, transparency and merit character of civil service recruitment, selection and the position of senior staff and civil service integrity measures.

A lack of fully functioning and comprehensive information systems on public servants remains a challenge in the region. Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia have put more effort into developing reliable systems, but desirable standards are yet to meet. The governments in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia more proactively disseminate and promote data on their civil service than other administrations.

The regulation of temporary engagements remains an issue. Administrations generally do not prescribe specific criteria for the selection of all temporarily engaged staff, and the duration of such appointments lacks stricter regulation. Apart from in Serbia, there are no administration-wide statutory limits to the number of temporary engagements. Hiring procedures for temporary positions are assessed as most open and transparent in Kosovo, with clear limits on the duration of contracts. Civil servants mostly perceive temporary hiring as a common and poorly regulated practice, with the most negative perception in North Macedonia.

All public administrations are found to partially meet criteria for the transparency and fairness of recruitment procedures for civil servants. Montenegro and Serbia have invested efforts to make public competitions more accessible. Compared to the baseline monitoring (2017/2018), a slightly higher percentage of civil servants believe that recruitment procedures are merit-based. Major objections region-wide include that there is theoretically no option for candidates to supplement missing documents during application processes and that clarifications made for individual candidates during application processes are not made publicly available by administrations.

There are systemic problems regarding the political interference in public administrations. High shares of uncompetitive appointments to high civil service positions, including acting statuses, continue to be a problem in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Most surveyed civil servants in the region believe that senior civil servants are appointed based on political support and that dismissal procedures are not properly applied. In addition, CSOs believe there are high levels of political influence on senior civil servants, which impacted lowering the scores for Albania.

With the exception of Kosovo, remuneration systems in the Western Balkan administrations are partially or fully simply structured and some types of information about salary systems are available to the public. Albanian and Serbian laws on salaries are the sole in the region with clearly defined and limited supplements.

Legal and policy frameworks for public sector integrity are in place with different levels of completeness. Region-wide, legal frameworks cover whistle-blower protections, ethical guidelines, and requirements to disclose assets. Some identified issues include limited provisions on secondary employment for civil servants (Albania) and on the receipt of gifts/benefits (Serbia). Surveyed civil servants in the region are generally pessimistic about the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, with only 14% stating they would feel protected as whistle-blowers.

V. ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most important concepts within a public governance system, accountability assumes the existence of lines of responsibility and an understanding of a relationship between the one who lays accounts and the one who is accounted to. On the most general level, accountability presumes the relationship between a government and the people who have elected it. In this relationship, the latter have the right to be informed about the government's actions and are guaranteed certain standards in treatment and compensation in cases in which this right is infringed. Accountability is also important within a system of government, presupposing clear lines of responsibility and liability between parliaments and the government, the government and ministers, and ministers and senior managers, ministries, and subordinate agencies. This means that "each part of an organisation is internally accountable, and that the institution as a whole is externally accountable to the political, judicial and social systems and oversight institutions, and is providing wide access to public information."[88]

Within the SIGMA framework of principles, accountability covers a wide range of questions related to internal accountability within an administration (Principle 1) and external accountability of the government and administration to the public. In the scope of the latter, the accountability comprises the right to access public information (Principle 2), which is a particular focus of WeBER monitoring. It also covers the protection of the rights of individuals to good administration (Principle 3), fairness of administrative disputes (Principle 4), and the functioning of systems for redressing or compensating for unlawful acts and omissions of public authorities (public liability regime – Principle 5).

V.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018[89]

All administrations in the Western Balkan region are implementing laws guaranteeing the right of access to information of public significance (or freedom of information – FOI). Since the baseline PAR Monitor, a process of legislative revision has been ongoing in Serbia – albeit with significant delays since its start in 2018. The consultation process for new legislation in Montenegro was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then resumed, though the civil society has expressed doubts towards the quality of the legislative proposal.[90] At the same time, over the course of 2019, new laws regulating public information access were adopted in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

■ Legislative and institutional framework

Overall, in terms of quality of legislative solutions, FOI laws in the WB still rank highly in global terms, although in most cases rankings have deteriorated since the previous PAR Monitor (see Table 25 below). Basic procedural provisions have remained the same, as the laws require individuals to only meet minimum requirements when submitting requests, without needing to state the reasons for such requests. Deadlines for administrations to provide responses remain the shortest in Kosovo at only 7 days, with the possibility of an 8-day extension (15 days in total). Although shortened in the newly adopted Law, the initial deadline of 20 days is still longest in North Macedonia (30 days in total, counting a legally prescribed extension). Public authorities in Serbia, however, can extend their response time the most compared to other administrations – to a maximum of 40 days in total. Access to information remains free of charge across the region if replies are received electronically or through an in-person request at the premises of an administrative body. For copies of documents or postal services a fee is legally payable, although institutions can decide not to charge fees even if allowed by law, as is the prevailing practice in Serbia.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought about regulations which have caused delays in certain cases. During the state of emergency in Serbia, the Government extended deadlines in administrative procedures to 30 days after the lifting of state of emergency.[91] Evidence from exercising FOI right during this monitoring cycle reveals that the handling

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88   SIGMA/OECD, "The Principles of Public Administration", 2017, p.54, https://bit.ly/2Kvm4iO (last accessed on 1 February 2021).

89   The state of play is to a large extent based on the European Commission's progress reports published in 2020 (which are therefore not cited separately), while other sources used are cited separately. Reports are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en (last accessed on 1 February 2021).

90   Institute Alternative, "Five NGOs submitted comments on the Draft Law on Free Access to Information", 2019, available at: https://bit.ly/3rPjlFY, and Institute Alternative, "Open Letter to the President of the Government of Montenegro", 2020, available at: https://bit.ly/3rPNZ1N (last accessed on 15 March 2021).

91   Regulation on Applicable Deadlines in Administrative Procedures During the State of Emergency, Official Gazette 41/2020-3, 43/2020-3, available at: https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/fp/covid19 (last accessed on 2 February 2021).

of requests by different public authorities of the central government in Serbia was uneven and unpredictable, with some of them abiding by the Regulation on Applicable Deadlines in Administrative procedures during the State of Emergency, and others by the FOI law.[92] In North Macedonia, civil society expressed concerns over the freezing of deadlines for all administrative procedures, including FOI requests, during the state of emergency, yet, in practice, WeBER researchers did not experience any delays in obtaining requested information.

Table 25: Global Right to Information rankings for Western Balkan administrations[93]

	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
2018	2	6	16	25	29	51
2021	3	6	23	30	36	59

Source: Global Right to Information Rating (RTI)

The institutional setup for the oversight of FOI implementation varies across the region in terms of the choice and organisation of supervisory institutions. These institutions are all responsible to parliaments who elect their heads. Kosovo and North Macedonia report the only examples of institutional changes since the previous monitoring cycle, based on new legislation enacted in 2019. The Kosovo Information and Privacy Agency, established under the personal data protection legislation, became competent for monitoring the implementation of the FOI law. Yet, as its Commissioner has not been elected yet, FOI rights in Kosovo remain effectively unprotected. The Ombudsperson in Kosovo still plays a role in FOI supervision, such as in assisting citizens to achieve their rights, and together with BIH, represent the only two cases where partial or full supervision is granted to ombudsman institutions. With the passing of a new law in North Macedonia, the five-member State Commission has been replaced by the Agency for Protection of Free Access to Public Information Rights, and, for the first time since mid-2018, the parliament elected this supervisory body's head in December 2019. The Agency, through its misdemeanour commission, is granted powers to conduct misdemeanour procedures and impose sanctions for breaches of the FOI legislation.

Table 26: FOI supervisory bodies in the Western Balkans

	SUPERVISORY BODY	POSITION
ALB	Commissioner for Freedom of Information and Personal Data Protection	Independent institution elected by the parliament
BIH	The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of BIH	Independent institution for human rights protection with three ombudspersons elected by the parliamentary assembly
KOS	Information and Privacy Agency (and the Ombudsperson)	Independent agency with a commissioner elected by the parliament
MKD	Agency for Protection of Free Access to Public Information Rights	Independent agency with a director elected by the parliament based on public vacancy call
MNE	Agency for Personal Data Protection and Free Access to Information	Three-member council appointed by the parliament with a director appointed by the council by public vacancy call
SRB	Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection	Independent institution elected by the parliament

Proactive provision of information by public authorities remains regulated in most cases as well, except in BIH, and legislation specifies what types of information they need to regularly publish on their websites. Overall, legislation either lists what key information they need to make available (Kosovo, North Macedonia,

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92   For example, the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications notified requesters that it was not in the position to respond due to the state of emergency, thus delaying its response as the request did not directly address the issue of COVID-19. The Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, on the other hand, acted according to the regular procedure without invoking the Regulation.

93   Ranks may be lower due to higher number of administrations evaluated by the RTI in this cycle. For 2021, the table shows the ranks of WB administrations out of a total of 128 administrations worldwide, and for 2018, out of a total of 111. The table includes rankings at the moment of writing, and rankings pertain only to the quality of the existing legal framework. Global Right to Information Rating, available at: http://www.rti-rating.org/ (last accessed on 1 February 2021).

and Montenegro), or requires publishing specific information in separate publications, such as transparency programmes in Albania and information booklets in Serbia. Still, there are no attempts in the region to unify or simplify government portals to present available information from various ministries and agencies in one place.

With the adoption of its new FOI legislation, North Macedonia has raised the bar in terms of proactive publication requirements for some more sensitive types of information. Namely, it is now mandatory for public authorities there to publish annual and quarterly budget data, audit reports, as well as complete documentation on public procurements, concessions, and public-private partnership contracts. In Montenegro, public authorities need to release, inter alia, information on the salaries of officials and on the use of public revenues and state property, while in Serbia, information on procurement plans and salaries of civil servants are required elements of institutions' information booklets. It is noteworthy that the new law in Kosovo requires public authorities to proactively publish all official documents from their work "as soon as such documents are made available for publication, but not later than fifteen (15) days from the moment they are rendered accessible."[94]

Good practices: Access to treasury information through proactive publishing

The new Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character in **North Macedonia**,[95] unlike legislation in the rest of the region, obliges public authorities to release information on their payments that go through the treasury on their websites, in a manner that indicates relevant budget users and accounts, amounts, unique tax numbers of recipients (for legal entities), and names of recipients (for natural persons). According to the law, the personal data published is available for two years from the date of publication.

Moreover, the Treasury Administration is obliged to inform the public of such transactions through its website as well, by publishing the list of budget users, and their units, as well as periodic reports on revenue collection and expenditures of the state and municipal budgets. These provisions go hand in hand with budget transparency initiatives determined as good practice, such as open finance portal (see chapter on PFM).

Practices to avoid: Failing to deliver on ambitious proactive information requirements

According to the **Montenegro's** Law on Free Access to Information, its public institutions are obliged to publish relevant information online regularly and proactively, although this is rarely practiced. An independent analysis published at the end of 2018 covered websites of 139 public institutions and concluded that only 6% can be considered highly proactive in this regard, while 35% was moderately, and 45% only slightly so.[96] It is noted for instance, that ministries mostly published general information on their work, with few publishing information regarding the individual acts which directly reveal how they operate. Other state administration bodies are assessed as even more opaque, with most of them revealing less than half of what is legally prescribed. Along these lines, other CSO sources tell that ministries are not as proactive as the official reports by the Agency for Personal Data Protection and Free Access to Information tend to indicate. [97]

Furthermore, although not yet fully mature in practice, additional steps have been taken in the region towards building a robust open data policy. The Law on Access to Public Documents in Kosovo, and the Law on Free Access to Information in Montenegro dedicate separate chapters to open data and public authorities' obligations on preparing and publishing them. In Kosovo, this law also establishes the right of every person to re-use data in line with legal provisions. FOI laws in the rest of the region do not explicitly regulate access to open data, though this is sometimes covered by other pieces of legislation (such as the Law on eGovernment in Serbia). Since 2018, all governments in the region, except for the state-level BIH, are now running open data portals, where datasets from various public authorities and regarding different subjects can be found.

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94   Article 6 of the Law No. 06/L-081 On Access to Public Documents, available at: https://bit.ly/3pIgwp4 (last accessed on 2 February 2021).

95   Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character, Official Gazette no. 101/2019, available at: https://bit.ly/36DCMJ6 (last accessed on 3 February 2021).

96   MANS, "Analysis of Proactive Information Provision in Montenegro", 2018, available at: https://bit.ly/2NHQqnR (last accessed on 18 February 2021).

97   Institute Alternative, "Boasts without basis for transparency of the ministries", 2019, available at: https://bit.ly/3dqZMiD (last accessed on 18 February 2021).

Table 27: Number of datasets and state organisations sharing their data on open data portals

	ORGANISATIONS	OPEN DATASETS	OPEN DATA PORTAL
ALB[98]	20	88	http://opendata.gov.al/
KOS[99]	26	205	https://opendata.rks-gov.net/
MKD	55	266	http://www.otvorenipodatoci.gov.mk/
MNE	19	123	https://data.gov.me/
SRB	80	308	https://data.gov.rs/

Note: Snapshot on 1 February 2021

■ Implementation

When it comes to the implementation of FOI legislation in practice, there are a few persisting challenges in the WB, which have become issues of growing concern. Non-responsiveness of public authorities is still common practice in parts of the region, through administrative silence, i.e. the withholding of responses to requested information, or simply failing to properly act upon requests. Based on the European Commission's reports, institutions at all levels of governance in BIH often provide incomplete information and do not adequately justify refusals. In Montenegro, there is an increasing amount of information labelled as classified, with the European Commission opining that international and European standards are yet to be met, both in terms of legal frameworks and in practice. Administrative silence in Serbia remains among the key stumbling blocks, and many information holders do not provide data even upon requests of the Commissioner for Free Access to Information and Personal Data Protection, despite their legal obligations. In Albania as well, access to information on public procurement contracts or salaries of officials is poorly enforced in practice.

At the same time, the supervisory bodies for FOI implementation are either lacking capacities to fully monitor implementation and sanction noncompliance (such as in Albania, BIH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro) or their decisions are non-binding for public administration bodies and officials (Montenegro). In Kosovo, the appointment of a head of the new Information and Privacy Agency is a crucial step for the implementation of the free access to public documents. Recently, it was also the case that long delays in appointing heads left many unanswered requests without the possibility for appeals (the Agency in North Macedonia was without a head in the period from May 2018 to January 2020, while the position of the Commissioner of the Agency in Kosovo is still vacant). Finally, the European Commission reports that journalists and civil society members were often deprived of fully exercising FOI rights in the previous period for various reasons. Late appointments of the Agency's management in North Macedonia left journalist associations without complaint mechanisms, while the number of journalists' complaints to the Commissioner in Serbia increased in 2019. Increases in information deemed classified in Montenegro, on the other hand, is effectively restricting citizen access to important decisions.

Finally, there are certain positive developments in Albania with an increase in the number of transparency programmes adopted by public authorities there, and with the establishment of a central registry for tracking the overall number of requests and those submitted online. The adoption of a transparency strategy in North Macedonia has paved the way for its government's open-data and open-finances portals, and the new FOI law there allows for the requesting of information on the financing of political parties.

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98   Calculated based on filtering options on the portal of the number of datasets per each area filtered (such as transport, diaspora, media, and others and number of organisations per institution filtered, as found on the portal at the time of writing).

99   Not every organisation registered on the portal has datasets uploaded.

V.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

The SIGMA principle covering the right to access public information is the only principle presently monitored in the area of accountability, yet this principle looks at both the proactive and reactive sides of the issue.

Principle 2: The right to access public information is enacted in legislation and consistently applied in practice.

This Principle bears utmost significance in increasing the transparency of administrations and holding them accountable by civil society and citizens, as well as in safeguarding the right-to-know by the general public as the precondition for better administration. The WeBER approach to the principle does not assess regulatory solutions embedded in free access to information acts but is based on the practice of reactive and proactive provision of information by administration bodies. On one hand, the approach considers the experience of members of civil society with enforcement of the legislation on access to public information, and on the other, it is based on direct analysis of the websites of administration bodies.

WeBER monitoring is performed using two indicators. The first one focuses entirely on civil society's perception of the scope of the right to access public information and whether enforcement mechanisms enable civil society to exercise this right in a meaningful manner. To explore perceptions, a survey of CSOs in Western Balkans was implemented using an online surveying platform from the second half of June to the beginning of August 2020.[100] The uniform questionnaire with 28 questions was used to assess all Western Balkan administrations, ensuring an even approach in survey implementation. It was disseminated in local languages through the existing networks and platforms of civil society organisations with large contact databases and through centralised points of contact such as governmental offices in charge of cooperation with civil society. To ensure that the survey targeted as many organisations as possible in terms of types, geographical distributions, and activity areas, and hence contributed to a representative sample, additional boosting was done where increases to overall responses were needed. Finally, a focus group with CSOs was organised to complement survey findings with qualitative data. Focus group results were not, however, used for point allocation for the indicator.

The second indicator focuses on proactive informing of the public by administration bodies, particularly by monitoring the comprehensiveness, timeliness, and clarity of the information disseminated through official websites. In total, 18 pieces of information were selected and assessed against two groups of criteria: 1) basic criteria, looking at the information's completeness, and whether it was up to date, and 2) advanced criteria, looking at the accessibility and citizen-friendliness of the information.[101] Information was gathered from the official websites of a sample of seven administration bodies consisting of three line ministries (a large, a medium, and a small ministry in terms of thematic scopes), a ministry with general planning and coordination functions, a government office with centre-of-government functions, a subordinate body to a minister/ministry, and a government office in charge of delivering services.

V.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 2: THE RIGHT TO ACCESS PUBLIC INFORMATION IS ENACTED IN LEGISLATION AND CONSISTENTLY APPLIED IN PRACTICE

The first indicator in this section is the "Civil society perception of the quality of legislation and practice of access to public information" (indicator ACC_P2_I1) consisting of 13 elements and is based on the survey of CSOs as its main data source, with some references made to the findings of the focus groups. The section

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100 The survey of CSOs was administered through an anonymous, online questionnaire. The data collection method included CASI (computer-assisted self-interviewing).

101 Exceptions being information on accountability lines within administration bodies, which was assessed only against the first group of criteria, and information available in open data format, which was assessed separately.

then lays out regional comparative findings for the second accountability indicator, "Proactive informing of the public, by public authorities" (indicator ACC_P2_I2), which comprises 18 elements based on website analysis of seven state administration bodies.

Table 28: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for ACC_P2_I1 "Civil society perception of the quality of legislation and practice of access to public information"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. CSOs consider that the information recorded and documented by public authorities is sufficient for the proper application of the right to access public information.	4	2	0	0	0	0	0
E2. CSOs consider exceptions to the presumption of the public character of information to be adequately defined.	2	1	0	1	1	0	0
E3. CSOs consider exceptions to the presumption of the public character of information to be adequately applied.	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E4. CSOs confirm that information is provided in the requested format.	2	0	1	1	2	0	1
E5. CSOs confirm that information is provided within prescribed deadlines.	2	1	1	1	2	0	1
E6. CSOs confirm that information is provided free of charge.	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
E7. CSOs confirm that the person requesting access is not obliged to provide reasons for requests for public information.	2	1	0	1	1	1	1
E8. CSOs confirm that in practice the non-classified portions of otherwise classified materials are released.	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E9. CSOs consider that requested information is released without portions containing personal data.	2	0	0	0	1	1	1
E10. CSOs consider that when only portions of classified materials are released, it is not done to mislead the requesting person with only bits of information.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E11. CSOs consider that the designated supervisory body has, through its practice, set sufficiently high standards of the right to access public information.	4	2	2	4	0	0	2
E12. CSOs consider the soft measures issued by the supervisory authority to public authorities to be effective.	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
E13. CSOs consider that the supervisory authority's power to impose sanctions leads to sufficiently grave consequences for responsible persons in the noncompliant authority.	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**34**	**11**	**6**	**11**	**9**	**3**	**8**
Indicator value 2019/2020[102]	**0-5**	1	0	1	1	0	1
Indicator value 2017/2018		1	0	1	1	0	1

CSOs views on the functioning of the FOI systems continued to be largely negative, again with a few exceptions regarding some basic procedural aspects of requesting information. Namely, only one fifth of respondent CSOs expressed agreement that public authorities record sufficient information to enable the proper exercise of FOI rights. In contrast, 39% of them disagreed with this statement, which almost mirrors perceptions from the previous monitoring cycle (37%). The highest share in agreement was once again found in Albania, and the lowest in Kosovo and Montenegro (49% and 46% disagreement, respectively). CSOs in North Macedonia

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102 Conversion of points: 0-6 points = 0; 7-11 points = 1; 12-17 points = 2; 18-23 points = 3; 24-28 points = 4; 29-34 points = 5.

were slightly less negative this time, but nearly half of all respondents had neutral responses to this statement (47% neither agreed nor disagreed).

On average, just below one third of respondents (32%) agreed that current legislation prescribes adequate exceptions to the public character of information, which is 8 percentage points higher than in the baseline monitoring cycle. The share of CSOs who disagree that these exceptions are adequate comes quite close (29%). CSOs in Kosovo have the most positive views regarding this statement (53% in agreement) along with Albanian CSOs (43%), who had been the most positive in the baseline PAR Monitor. On the other hand, CSOs perceptions have become significantly less favourable in Montenegro, with 67% of CSOs there disagreeing, and an almost negligible 10% agreeing with this statement.

Regarding the application of these exceptions in practice, views of CSOs were more negative, with only 11% at the regional level agreeing that exceptions are adequately applied, keeping in line with the baseline PAR Monitor. The highest agreement is recorded this time in BIH, albeit reaching only 16%, whilst disagreement is once again highest in Montenegro at around two thirds (65%). Montenegro and Serbia saw the lowest shares of neutral responses (20% and 23%, respectively) which possibly indicates greater experience of CSOs in exercising FOI, compared to the higher regional average of 29%.

Further, CSOs that have confirmed recent experience in sending out FOI requests were asked about the more specific aspects of their experience of exercising their right to information.[103] On average, 42% of this group of CSOs confirmed that they often or always receive responses to FOI requests in the requested format, 3 percentage points less than in the previous monitoring cycle. CSOs in North Macedonia hold the most positive attitude in this regard (73%), and those in Albania the least (20%). The chart below shows that North Macedonian CSOs have the most positive views regarding the procedural issues in general, such as deadlines, charges for free access to information, as well as the requirements to provide reasons for FOI requests.

Charts 27, 28 and 29. Responses to the question "When your organisation requests free access to information, how often is it the case that…" (frequency scale, %)

…information is provided within prescribed deadlines?

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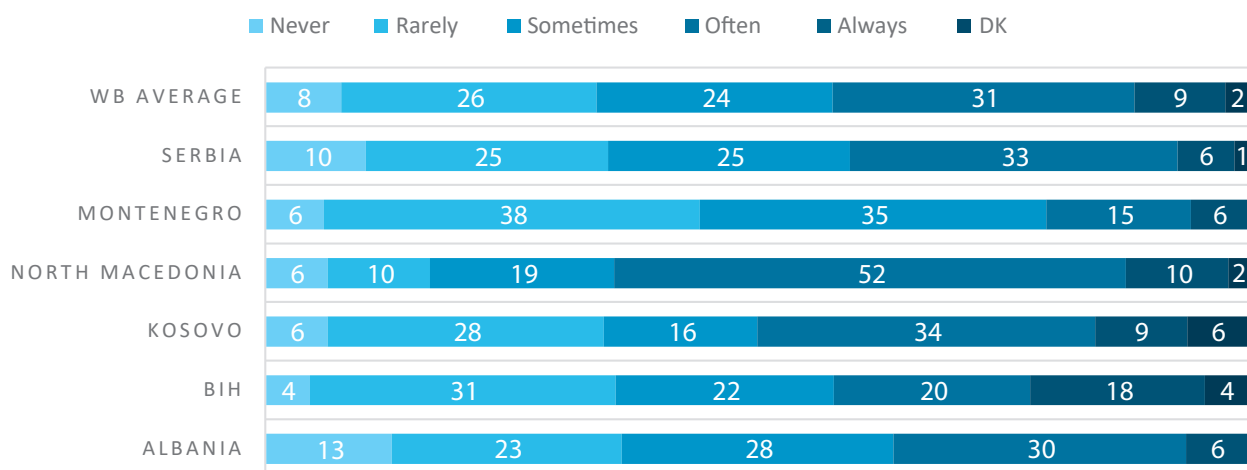
103 Respondents were also asked if their organisations had sent requests for free access to information in the past two years, and only those who replied "yes" were asked the more specific FOI-related questions looking into practices. On average, 56% of CSOs responded positively, while 44% gave a negative response. Serbia is the only administrations in which more organisations responded with "no" than with "yes" (53% as opposed to 42%), though it contributed the highest number of CSO survey participants in the region, closely followed by respondents in BIH. In Kosovo, 78% of CSOs responded they have sent FOI requests and 22% said they did not.

...information is provided free of charge?

Legend: Never · Rarely · Sometimes · Often · Always · DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	3	7	11	19	56	4
SERBIA	3	4	9	22	57	6
MONTENEGRO		9	18	26	26	21
NORTH MACEDONIA	2	2 4	17		73	2
KOSOVO	3		9		78	9
BIH	4	13	13	31	36	2
ALBANIA	2	2 9	9		74	4
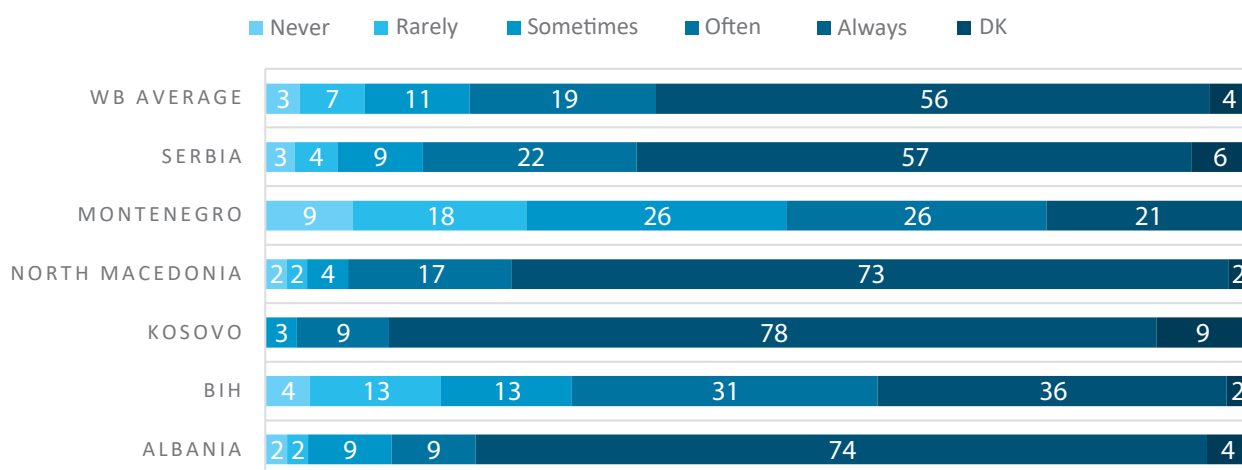
...the person requesting access is asked to provide reasons for such a request?
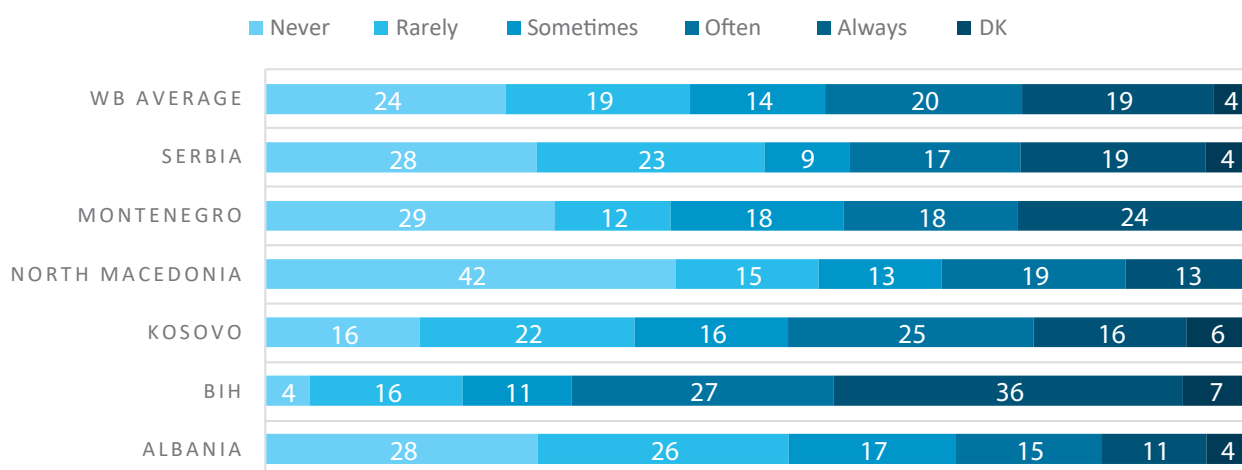
Legend: Never · Rarely · Sometimes · Often · Always · DK

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	DK
WB AVERAGE	24	19	14	20	19	4
SERBIA	28	23	9	17	19	4
MONTENEGRO	29	12	18	18	24	
NORTH MACEDONIA	42	15	13	19	13	
KOSOVO	16	22	16	25	16	6
BIH	4	16	11	27	36	7
ALBANIA	28	26	17	15	11	4

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N=275 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

CSOs in the region still have limited experience with requesting information which contains classified materials. Similar to the baseline PAR Monitor, 37% on average could not provide their opinions on the question of whether non-classified portions of requested material are released, opting for the "don't know" option. Nevertheless, CSOs in Albania continue to be the most disapproving, with 43% of respondents stating that such materials are never or rarely released. Perceptions tend to be negative in the rest of the region too, with "never" and "rarely" being most common choices. The shares of "often" and "always" responses do not exceed a fifth of respondents (20% in BIH and 19% in Serbia).

When it comes to requesting information which contains personal data, CSOs continue to have more informed views, and on average, the share of "don't know" answers shows a clear drop as compared to the previous question. That said, a third of respondents (32%) claim that parts of requested materials which do not contain personal data are often or always released (an increase of just 2 percentage points vis-à-vis the previous monitoring cycle). The strongest views in this regard can be seen in North Macedonia (42%) and Montenegro (41%). Albanian CSOs expressed the least positive opinions.

Almost half of surveyed CSOs in the region (47%) believe that public authorities sometimes, often, or always deliberately release incomplete information to those requesting it (with the objective of misleading them). In Kosovo and Montenegro, this perception is held by over half of respondents (56% and 53%, respectively). Bosnian and Serbian CSOs are the least negative in this regard, with one in four respondents responding that this "never" or "rarely" happens. Albania records the highest number of CSOs without an opinion on this matter (49%).

The final set of questions concerns the role and effectiveness of the work of the designated FOI supervisory bodies. On these questions, perceptions are again split between three administrations where organisations tend to be somewhat more approving (Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia) and those where they are generally less so (BIH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro). A regional average of 37% of respondents in agreement is recorded when CSOs are asked whether supervisory bodies have set sufficiently high standards for the right to access public information, with those in Kosovo agreeing the most (63%). Albanian CSOs follow closely, with 56% in agreement. The sharpest change among the opinions of CSOs is recorded in Serbia, where agreement fell to 45%, 15 percentage points down from the previous monitoring cycle. This abrupt decrease in CSO approval of the work of the FOI supervisory body in Serbia coincides with the end of mandate of the first Commissioner and the appointment of an individual who was criticised by civil society as being close to the ruling party.[104]
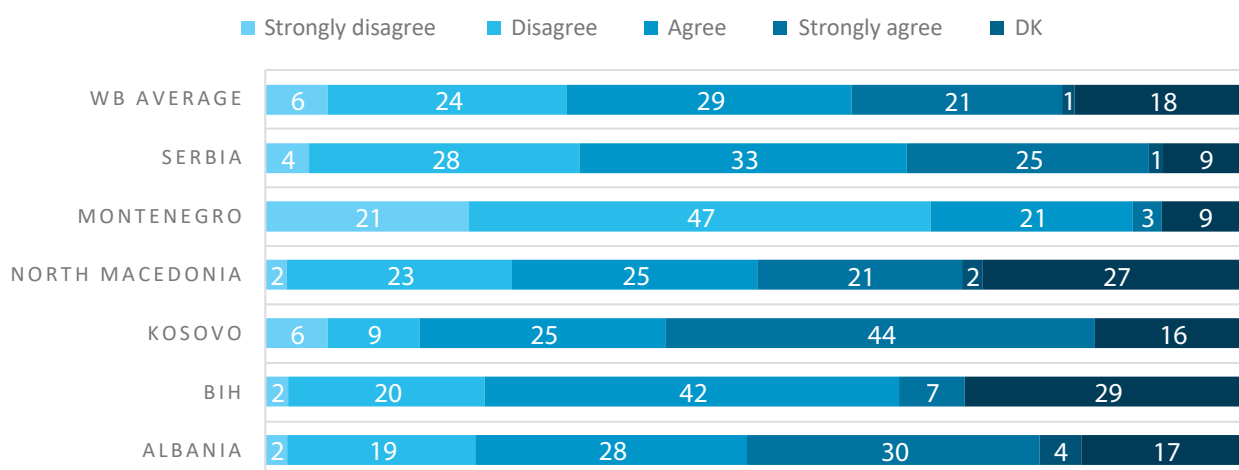
Furthermore, there is 22% of agreement overall when CSOs are asked if soft measures issued by the supervisory body are effective in protecting access to information. CSOs in Kosovo express the highest total agreement with this statement, at 44%. In Serbia, only a quarter of respondents agree with this statement, signifying a large drop of 35 percentage points from the last monitoring cycle and a shift from a prevailingly positive stance towards a considerably more reserved one. Organisations in Montenegro continue to perceive this issue most negatively in the region, with only 3% of respondents agreeing that soft measures are effective (Chart 30).

Chart 30: CSO perceptions on two statements related to the role of the designated supervisory body for FOI (%):
The designated supervisory body sets, through its practice, sufficiently high standards of the right to access public information.

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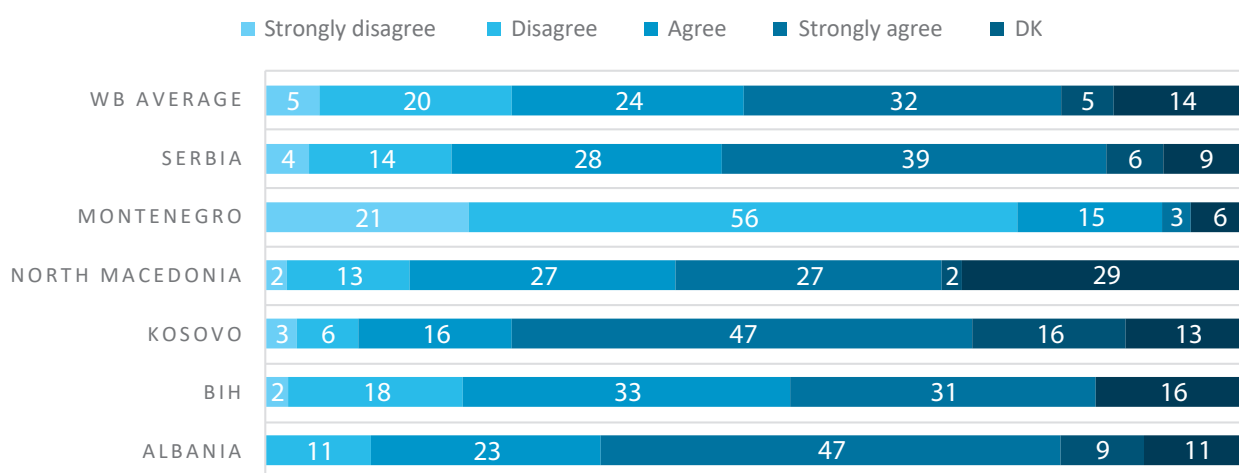
104   CSOs were especially concerned with the fact that the already-delayed process of choosing the new Commissioner lacked transparency and public debate, and that insufficient time was given for proposing and presenting candidates. In the end, out of the three candidate proposals, the National Assembly elected the candidate proposed by members of the ruling party. Reactions of civil society are available at: https://bit.ly/3ljiPNP, and https://bit.ly/3lh7TAx (last accessed on 15 March 2021).

Soft measures issued by the supervisory authority to public authorities are effective in protecting access to information.
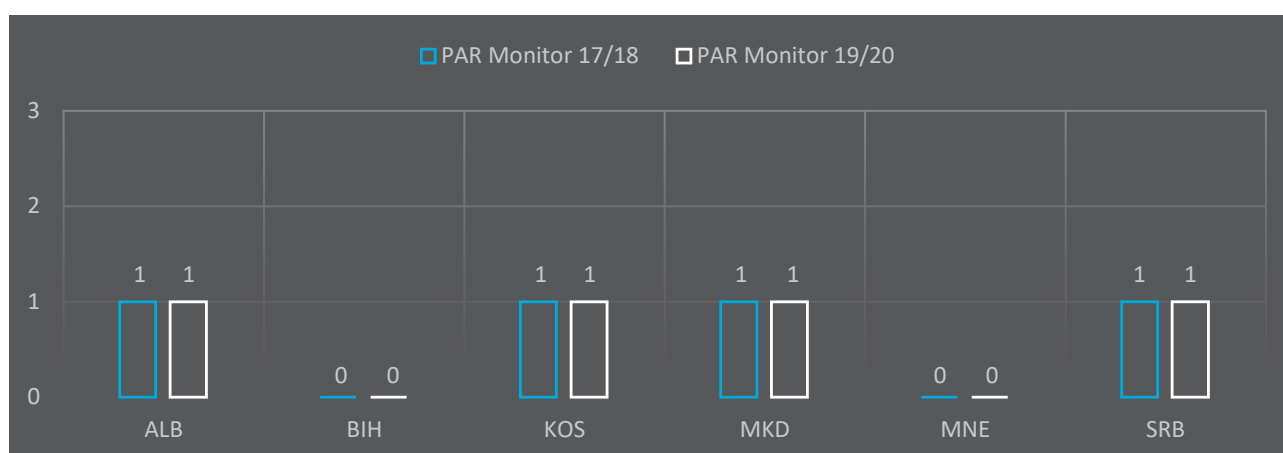
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	DK	
WB AVERAGE	6	24	29	21	1	18
SERBIA	4	28	33	25	1	9
MONTENEGRO	21	47	21		3	9
NORTH MACEDONIA	2	23	25	21	2	27
KOSOVO	6	9	25	44		16
BIH	2	20	42	7		29
ALBANIA	2	19	28	30	4	17

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N=275 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

Finally, results resound with the baseline PAR Monitor when CSOs are asked if sanctions prescribed for violating the rights to FOI lead to sufficiently grave consequences for those responsible in the non-compliant authorities. At the regional level, 43% hold the view that sanctions are not strong enough (just 2 percentage points down from before), in contrast to 22% who believe the opposite. Likewise, Albanian CSOs still tend to agree more when compared to regional peers (53%) and disagree the least (17%). Disagreement remains highest in Montenegro, reaching 76% (and representing an increase of 5 percentage points) with, as in the baseline monitoring cycle, just 3% in agreement.

Overall, CSOs' experiences in exercising rights to FOI tend to be predominantly negative and only turn slightly more positive in relation to a few basic procedural requirements. The institutional mechanisms for the protection of rights to FOI are largely seen, with a couple of exceptions, as ineffective, and a marked deterioration is noted in Serbia. As a result, the indicator values match those from the PAR Monitor 2017/18.

Graph 14: Indicator values for ACC_P2_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

Legend: □ PAR Monitor 17/18 □ PAR Monitor 19/20

	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
PAR Monitor 17/18	1	0	1	1	0	1
PAR Monitor 19/20	1	0	1	1	0	1

Table 29: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for ACC_P2_I2 "Proactive informing of the public, by public authorities"

	Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
1.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on scopes of work	4	2	4	0	2	0	4
2.	Websites of public authorities contain easily accessible and citizen-friendly information on scopes of work	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
3.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on accountability (who they are responsible to)	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
4.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on relevant policy documents and legal acts	4	0	2	4	4	2	2
5.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly information on relevant policy documents and legal acts	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
6.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on policy papers, studies, and analyses relevant to policies under competence	4	0	0	2	0	0	0
7.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly information on policy papers, studies, and analyses relevant to policies under competence	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
8.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date annual reports	2	0	2	0	0	2	0
9.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly annual reports	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
10.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on institutions' budgets	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
11.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly information on institutions' budgets	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
12.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date contact information (including e-mail addresses)	4	0	4	2	2	4	2
13.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly contact information (including e-mail addresses)	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
14.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date organisational charts which include entire organisational structures	4	2	2	0	2	2	2
15.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly organisational charts which include entire organisational structures	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
16.	Websites of public authorities contain complete and up-to-date information on contact points for cooperation with civil society and other stakeholders, including public consultation processes	4	2	4	2	0	0	2
17.	Websites of public authorities contain accessible and citizen-friendly information on ways in which they cooperate with civil society and other external stakeholders, including public consultation processes	2	0	1	1	0	0	1
18.	Public authorities proactively pursue open data policy	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total points	56	9	22	15	15	14	23
	Indicator value 2019/2020[105]	0-5	**0**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**
	Indicator value 2017/2018		2	2	1	0	1	3

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105 Conversion of points: 0-10 points = 0; 11-19 points = 1; 20-28 points = 2; 29-37 points = 3; 38-46 points = 4; 47-56 points = 5.

As this is the first indicator analysed in this PAR Monitor cycle, with a period of observation from February to March 2020, the findings presented below reflect the state of play in that period. In some cases, findings were affected by changes in the organisation of state administration bodies after the restructuring of governments, as in Kosovo, which also required the reconfiguration of their websites. It is also important to note that analyses for this indicator rely on a sample of seven state administration bodies and therefore do not reflect the situation in every state administration institution but rather prevailing practice. Finally, as in the previous cycle, the monitoring included expert analysis and frequent regional comparative discussions to compare and even out approaches among researchers, thus maximising the comparability of the findings.

Table 30: Sample of state administration bodies in WB

SAMPLE	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
LINE MINISTRY 1 (LARGE)	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	Ministry of Civil Affairs	Ministry of Economy, Labour, Trade, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Strategic Investments	Ministry of Interior	Ministry of Education	Ministry for Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
LINE MINISTRY 2 (MEDIUM)	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs	Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees	Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment	Ministry of the Environment and Physical Planning	Ministry of Defence	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government
LINE MINISTRY 3 (SMALL)	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Ministry of Security	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports	Ministry of Culture	Ministry of Sport and Youth	Ministry of Culture and Media
MINISTRY (GENERAL PLANNING/ COORDINATION)	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of Finance and Treasury	Ministry of Finance and Transfers	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Public Administration	Ministry of European Integration
COG BODY	Prime Minister's Office	Directorate for Economic Planning	Office of Prime Minister	Office of the President of the Government	General Secretariat of the Government	General Secretariat of the Government
SUBORDINATE BODY	Agency for Land Reallocation and Compensation	Service for Foreigners' Affairs	Tax Administration of Kosovo	Office for Management of Register of Births, Marriage and Deaths	Environment Protection Agency	Environmental Protection Agency
SERVICE DELIVERY BODY	State Cadastral Agency	Agency for Identification Documents, Registers, and Data Exchange	Kosovo Cadastral Agency	Education Development Bureau	Tax Administration	Tax Administration

Information on the scopes of work, organisational charts, and general contacts published on the websites of sampled institutions remain largely complete and up to date, with some variations. In BIH and Serbia, scopes of work were complete and updated in all cases. In Montenegro, only two out of seven institutions had this information published at the time of monitoring. Outside of BIH and Serbia, this information is not easily accessible online across the region, meaning that more than three clicks are required to reach it. Moreover, descriptions of institutions' work are often not citizen-friendly, as they are usually taken verbatim from legislation (the exception being in North Macedonia). The contact information of institutions is mostly complete, updated (as validated through test calls), accessible, and mostly presented on dedicated contact pages. Albania is an exception, as websites do not provide contact information for sectors within institutions. Organisational charts are generally published and aligned with the official acts on internal organisations, which means that they are complete and updated (but not in the case in Kosovo at the time of monitoring). Citizens can access and download them easily for all administrations.

Policy documents and legal acts under the purview of sampled institutions are, for the most part, presented completely and are up to date, yet all requirements under the indicator element are included only in North Macedonia. Although these files are easily accessible, they are not particularly citizen friendly, as they are not accompanied by short explanations of their purposes or introductions. The same applies for policy papers, studies, and other analytical materials disclosed by sample institutions; although they are easily accessible, the

ways they are presented are not citizen friendly. The availability of policy papers and studies is lower than that of policy documents and legal acts, and the practice of their public disclosure has not developed significantly since the baseline PAR Monitor.

On the other hand, information on the lines of accountability, and who institutions are responsible to, is revealed only occasionally in the region, apart from in Serbia where this information was present for the entire sample. Albania and Montenegro are on the lower end of the spectrum in this case, with no observed publishing of this information.[106] Information on accountability is missing more regularly for ministries than for their subordinate bodies, or other central agencies.

Lack of basic annual reporting by public authorities remains of serious concern. Complete and updated annual reports are proactively published only in BIH and Montenegro by a majority of sampled institutions (between 70% and 90%). On the opposite side of the spectrum, a single institution published its annual report in both North Macedonia and Serbia, whereas in the rest of the region annual reporting is unevenly present.

Budget transparency remains an even more critical issue. As in the PAR Monitor 2017/18, Serbia is the case in which the most complete budget data is published and regularly updated. This state of play is owed to the fact that budgetary data constitutes a mandatory part of information booklets, publications whose purpose is to proactively inform the public on institutions' work, as stipulated by FOI law in Serbia. In the rest of the region, the situation remains quite dire, with no budget information on the websites of most sampled bodies. In BIH, due to the interim financing decision in the first quarter of 2020, no central institution had a financial plan for 2020 or a financial report for 2019.[107] Nevertheless, this PAR Monitor saw some noteworthy examples of institutional citizen-friendly budgets, such as by the Ministry of Public Administration in Montenegro.[108]

Institutions have demonstrated greater proactiveness that in the previous monitoring cycle in detailing how they cooperate with the public and civil society, including on how they perform public consultations, through their websites. In BIH and Kosovo most institutions provide clear links to e-consultation portals where citizens can find more information. In Albania and Serbia, institutions' websites mostly contain public consultation sections with relevant information or consultation coordinators' contacts. In Serbia, sampled institutions were more diligent this time around in providing specific details and explanations for each public debate/consultation under their purview than in the first monitoring cycle. In North Macedonia, no sampled institution released such information.

Good practices: Contact points for civil society

At the end of 2019, the former Office for Cooperation with Civil Society (now part of Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue) in **Serbia** initiated the appointments of contact points for cooperation with CSOs in public institutions at all three levels of government. The resulting database currently contains contact information for 191 appointed individuals by 140 bodies (which includes 23 state administration bodies). The database is publicly accessible through the still-operational webpage of the former Office.[109]

Lastly, the sampled state administration bodies do not actively pursue open data policies yet despite the occasional presence of open data on their websites. As in the previous monitoring cycle, few sampled authorities had published at least one open dataset linked to the substance of the work of their institution, combined with one dataset relevant from the perspective of FOI (such as employee lists, salaries, or public procurement and financial plans). Nevertheless, open data policy is gaining pace since the baseline PAR Monitor in the region, with increasingly operational open data portals in which increasing numbers of organisations publish open datasets, and in some cases, even legal requirements for publishing data in open formats (see "State of play" section).

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106 Information on accountability was only analysed against the first two criteria - completeness and whether the information was updated.

107 According to the WeBER methodology, completeness is assessed by checking if financial plans for the current year and financial reports for the previous year (or the last available financial report) of each sampled institution are available on websites at the time of monitoring. As for assessing citizen-friendliness, researchers checked whether institutions divulge citizen-friendly versions of their budgets for the current budget period.

108 Citizen-friendly budgets presented as infographics have been regularly published since 2017, available at: https://mju.gov.me/rubrike/budzet (last accessed on 8 February 2021).

109 A database of contacts is available at: https://bit.ly/2NBuMSj (last accessed on 18 February 2021).

Overall, sampled administration bodies mostly meet the criteria of completeness and of updating information on their websites, as in the baseline PAR Monitor. The accessibility criterion, measured by the number of clicks it takes to access information, as well as citizen friendliness criterion, assessed based on whether information is simplified for the non-expert public, are far less well-represented across the samples in the region. However, the identified critical issues from the previous cycle are still present, as some key pieces of information are entirely missing or scarcely published. In addition, information provided is largely citizen-unfriendly, and in some instances even incomplete or outdated. Consequently, the regional outlook has not significantly changed, while the indicator value has increased only for North Macedonia and decreased in the case of Serbia, and, even more so, Albania.

Graph 15: Indicator values for ACC_P2_I2 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
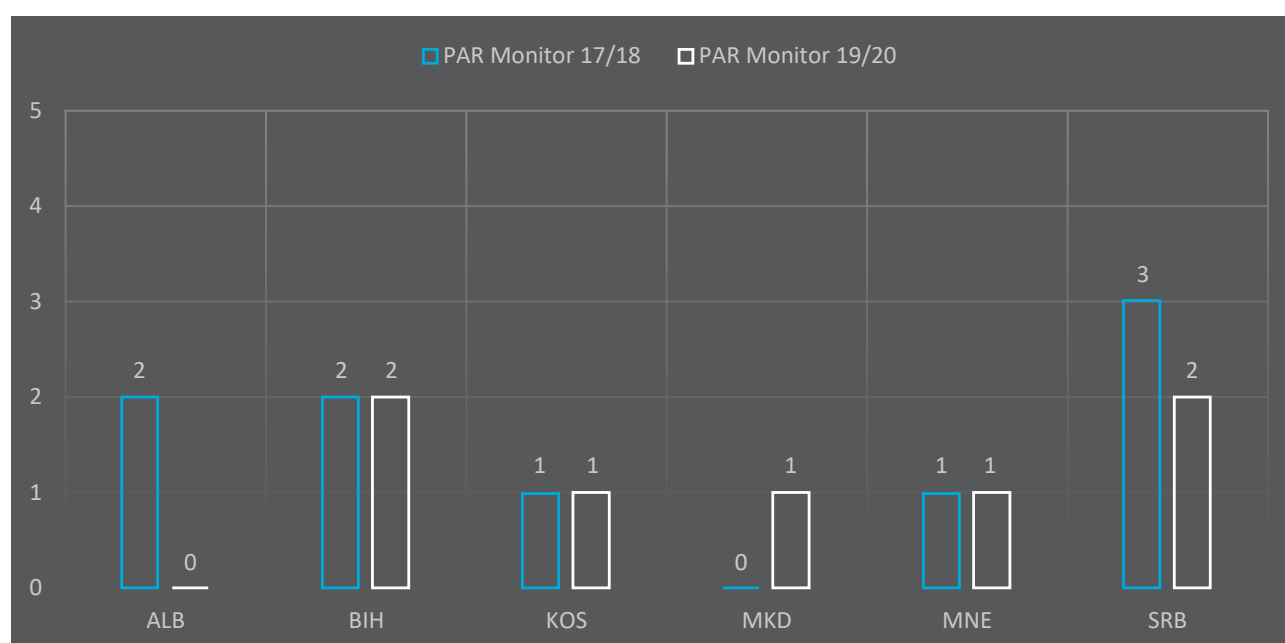
V.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE ACCOUNTABILITY AREA

In this area, WeBER monitors the extent to which the right to access public information is consistently applied in practice. To this end, WeBER looks at the experiences CSOs in using FOI legislation and analyses the proactive informing of the public through the websites of sampled public authorities.

Since the baseline PAR Monitor, CSOs in the WB have continued to express largely negative views on how the FOI system is implemented. Overall, one fifth of surveyed CSOs believe that public authorities record sufficient information to enable rights to the free access to information, with more than a third believing the opposite (39%). Although CSOs have expressed slightly more positive attitudes on the adequacy of exceptions to the public release of information (32%), they remain concerned with how these exceptions are applied in practice. As in the previous cycle, civil society actors tend to confirm they often or always receive requested information free of charge (75% on average) with 43% saying they have been never, or rarely, been asked for reasons behind their requests.

However, their experience with requesting information with classified parts is still limited. Although reduced compared to the baseline PAR Monitor, a high share of CSOs does not know if non-classified sections are released in practice (37%). They continue, however, to have more informed views on accessing information with personal data, as one third (32%) claims that parts of requested information which do not contain personal data are often or always released. The share of CSOs believing that public authorities release partial information with the intention of misleading requesters remains high (47% as opposed to 43% in 2017/18).

Finally, perceptions of the impacts of FOI supervisory bodies are yet again split between Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia, where CSOs tend to be more approving, and BIH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, where they are on average more critical. Replacing their Albanian peers in this cycle, CSOs in Kosovo emerge as the most positive in the region when asked if their supervisory body had set sufficiently high standards (63% of agreement), whereas the agreement among the CSOs in Serbia to this question has fallen by 15 percentage points, to 45%. The same pattern repeats when they were asked if soft measures are effective in FOI protection, but with an even sharper decline in the perception of Serbian CSOs - by 35 percentage points. CSOs in Montenegro provided the most negative responses to both questions.

On average, almost the same share of CSOs do not see sanctions for the violation of the right to information as sufficiently grave for those responsible, at 43%, with just above a fifth believing they are severe enough. Albania remains the positive outlier, with an absolute majority of CSOs agreeing that sanctions are sufficiently grave.

In keeping with the baseline PAR Monitor, state administration bodies mostly meet criteria regarding the completeness and updating of information published on their websites. That information is, however, not equally accessible, and even to a smaller degree made citizen friendly. This means that a significant portion of the information remains published in a bureaucratic fashion, without using simplified language or presentation. Institutions rarely publish annual work reports (except for BIH and Montenegro), whereas limited budget transparency remains as prominent as ever. Serbia is still the only notable exception in this regard, as its administrative bodies publish budgetary data in their information booklets. On a positive note, institutions have demonstrated more proactiveness this time around in providing information through their websites regarding how they cooperate with the public and civil society, including how they perform public consultation processes.

VI. SERVICE DELIVERY

In the eyes of any citizen, the provision of public services is among the most tangible activities of public administration, enabling the citizens to exercise their rights and freedoms. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has raised citizens' demands for services, especially contactless ones, and on the other hand, it has reminded public administrations of the paramount importance of providing services in a timely, simple, and efficient manner. The set of core services usually provided by public administrations encompasses, for instance, the issuing of personal documents and various permits, handling citizens' official requests, enabling citizens to pay taxes, keeping official records, and other tasks. They can be seen as administrative services, as they in principle relate to resolving individual administrative cases by issuing administrative acts and undertaking administrative actions at the request of individuals or otherwise.

In addition to administrative services, the state is often the main provider of a range of sectoral (specialised) services, such as health, education, and social protection services. While these services are equally important as administrative services, they are not the exclusive prerogative of the state and are frequently provided by the private sector as well. For this reason, they are not treated as administrative services, strictly speaking, and are not covered by either the Principles of Public Administration or by the PAR Monitor.

VI.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018

Better service delivery to citizens continues to be one of the prominent PAR strategic objectives in all Western Balkan administrations. Most administrations have continued to achieve general policy aims in service delivery through the implementation of PAR strategies and sectoral policies (such as the administrative simplification programme in Serbia).[110] Albania remains the only in the region with an overarching policy document on the delivery of citizen-centric services by central government.[111] Serbia is implementing a special programme to simplify administrative procedures for businesses with the aim of increasing the quality of public service delivery and reducing administrative burden and costs. Similar documents are currently being prepared in North Macedonia, including guidelines for service optimisation,[112] service delivery standards,[113] and a methodology for involving end users in improving public services in line with EU best practices.[114] Looking at e-services specifically, national digital government strategies are in place in all administrations except BIH,[115] either as part of digital agendas and information society development strategies (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia), e-government programmes (Serbia), or PAR strategies in parts related to the adoption of ICT tools to improve service delivery (North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia). Altogether, the region demonstrates solid strategic frameworks for service provision.

The institutional setup for managing service delivery remains almost identical to that of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle. Responsibilities for different aspects of service delivery policy continue to be diffused among various institutions, which sometimes creates challenges in communication and coordination. As an example, Montenegro's public administration ministry coordinates overall service delivery policy, but the leadership of administrative simplification is conferred to the Ministry of Finance. In Serbia, although the public administration ministry has the widest responsibility in service delivery, overall coordination also involves the Prime Minister's Office and the Office for Information Technologies and eGovernment, while the Public Policy Secretariat leads administrative simplification processes. Albania's ADISA remains the only agency in the region specialised for standards in citizen-centric public service delivery, including one-stop shops. In all WB administrations, there are bodies specifically assigned to lead and coordinate digital government policies (including digital service delivery), however the roles of these bodies are mostly advisory, and they have less decision-making authority than administrations in most OECD countries.[116]

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110 Government of Serbia, "Vlada usvojila Program za pojednostavljenje administrativnih postupaka" [Government Adopts Programme for Administrative Procedures Simplification], SRBIJA.GOV.RS, 11 July 2019, https://bit.ly/39OowPT (last accessed 4 February 2021).

111 ADISA, "Long-Term Policy Document on the Delivery of Citizen-Centric Services by Central Government Institutions in Albania," April 2016, https://bit.ly/2FF1lub (last accessed 20 February 2021).

112 MISA, "Draft Guidelines for Service Optimisation", 13 January 2020, https://bit.ly/3pQiLXv (last accessed 4 February.2021).

113 MISA, "Draft Standards in Service Delivery", 13 January 2020, https://bit.ly/3oJr5H6 (last accessed 4 February 2021).

114 MISA, "Draft Methodology for Involvement of End Users in the Process of Improving Public Services", 13 January 2020, https://bit.ly/3jfmdll (last accessed 4 February 2021).

115 OECD, "Government at a Glance: Western Balkans", OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020, p. 118, https://doi.org/10.1787/a8c72f1b-en (last accessed 4 February 2021).

116 Ibid., p. 12.

New laws on (general) administrative procedures (LAP), adopted in all administrations except BIH, have modernised legal frameworks in the region in line with EU standards. Varying levels of implementation, however, still impact successes in providing legal certainty and tangible benefits for citizens and businesses as users of public services. Harmonising LAPs with numerous acts regulating special administrative procedures represents a major challenge across the region. In Albania, for example, inter-institutional coordination issues and low administrative capacities contributed to delays in harmonisation and implementation of legislation.[117] SIGMA also assesses harmonisation in Kosovo as "slower than expected",[118] and in Serbia as "a challenge, due to capacity issues throughout the administration".[119] The once-only principle,[120] as one of the major reforms introduced by LAPs, has still not been systematically applied in Montenegro and service seekers in many cases have had to resubmit information already kept in the state records.[121]

In 2018 and 2019, the administrations in Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia enacted special laws on e-government to regulate the use of ICTs in these administrations and facilitate digital service provision. Complementary to this, these same governments also legally regulated key enablers of the use of digital services: such as electronic identification, electronic documents, electronic signature and trust services. In BIH, the adoption of a law tackling electronic identification and trust services in accordance with the EU acquis is still pending, although the first trust service providers are being registered, which is a step forward for introducing qualified electronic signatures.[122] The lack of a digital signature solution has been a key barrier for users of Kosovo's administrative services, and legislation there still needs to be fully harmonised with EU regulations.[123]

In practice, Western Balkan administrations increasingly follow the global trend of government digital transformation, including the simplification and digitalisation of public services. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these aims, especially to promote contactless services to correspond to the increased demand of citizens. BIH and Kosovo are the only in the region without operational national portals providing digital services. North Macedonia launched its national e-services portal in December 2019, while Serbia's redesigned e-government portal became operational in February 2020. Macedonia's national portal, at the time of writing of this report, offers a total of 809 catalogued services, out of which 150 (18%) are fully digital.[124] Based on data available from government websites, user take-up rates are yet to increase in Serbia and North Macedonia; while more than a half of the population uses the e-service portal in Albania, this is the case for less than 15% of the Serbian population and only 1.5% in North Macedonia (see Table 31). In Montenegro, the high costs of obtaining digital certificates (approximately 15% of the average monthly salary) creates a "considerable financial burden for users and makes e-services practically inaccessible for the population at large".[125] In BIH, portals exist on the entity level[126] and for Brčko District,[127] but they still mostly only provide information on services, while access to digital services is possible only through the pages of individual service providers. Similarly, the State Portal in Kosovo[128] primarily enables central access to information about services, but it does not feature any digital services (it rather directs users to the web pages of relevant institutions).

117 European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document: Albania 2020 Report", Brussels, 6 October 2020. SWD(2020) 354 final, p. 17.

118 OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Kosovo*", 2019, p. 5, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 4 February 2021).

119 OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Serbia", 2019, p. 33, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 4 February 2021).

120 Meaning "that citizens and businesses provide diverse data only once in contact with public administrations, while public administration bodies take actions to internally share and reuse these data – even across borders – always in respect of data protection regulations and other constraints." TOOP.EU, The Once-Only Principle Project, http://toop.eu/once-only (last accessed 4 February 2021).

121 OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Montenegro", 2019, p. 5, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 4 February 2021).

122 European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020 Report", Brussels, 6 October 2020 SWD (2020) 350 final, 2020, p. 15.

123 OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Kosovo*", 2019, p. 4, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 5 February 2021).

124 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, National e-Services Portal, https://uslugi.gov.mk/ (last accessed 4 February 2021).

125 OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Montenegro", 2019, p. 16, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 5 February 2021).

126 E-Government of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina http://euprava.fbih.gov.ba/; Portal javne uprave Republike Srpske http://www.esrpska.com/, (last accessed 5 February 2021).

127 eUsluge, Brčko District, http://euprava.bdcentral.net/ (last accessed 5 February 2021).

128 Kosovo State Portal, https://www.rks-gov.net (last accessed 5 February 2021).

Table 31. Publicly available government data about national e-services portals and their usability in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia[129]

	National e-services portals	# of services offered on the portal	# of fully digital services	# of users (citizens + businesses)	share of users in the population
Albania[130]	https://e-albania.al/	1792	601	1,614,457	56%
Montenegro[131]	http://www.euprava.me/	596	187	N/A	N/A
North Macedonia[132]	https://uslugi.gov.mk/	809	150	30,670	1.48%
Serbia[133]	https://www.euprava.gov.rs/	648	N/A	1,026,347	14.77%

According to the *EU eGovernment Benchmark 2020*,[134] Albania is the most successful in the region when it comes to user-centricity (especially regarding the provision of support and feedback for users of digital services as well as the mobile friendliness of those services).[135] Montenegro, on the other hand, holds the first place in the region regarding e-government transparency,[136] while Serbia is the forerunner in the area of key enablers i.e. technical preconditions for e-government, such as e-IDs or e-documents.[137] Kosovo and BIH were not included in the measurement. Each of the observed governments in the region scores less than the EU27+ average,[138] but this is the case for up to 11 other European countries as well (Graph 16).

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129 The table excludes BIH and Kosovo due to lack of data and unavailability of digital services on their national portals.

130 Source for the number of services: National Information Society Agency, "Raport vjetor përmbledhës 2019", https://bit.ly/2MQ5SOt; Source for the number of users: e-Albania portal, statistics through the month of January 2020, https://e-albania.al/Pages/Statistics/statistika.pdf (last accessed 4 February 2021).

131 Source for quantitative data: Ministry of Public Administration, "Reports on the analysis of the state of affairs in the area of e-services", 2019, available at https://bit.ly/32RiTMk (last accessed 15 March 2021).

132 Source for quantitative data: National e-Services Portal https://uslugi.gov.mk/ (last accessed 4 February 2021).

133 Source for quantitative data: Portal eUprava, https://euprava.gov.rs/ (last accessed 4 February 2021). The number of services was calculated manually.

134 BIH and Kosovo were not included in the benchmark. See European Commission, DG CONNECT, "eGovernment Benchmark 2020: eGovernment that Works for the People", 2020, https://bit.ly/3rnI5o5 (last accessed 4 February 2021).

135 Albania scored 72% for user-centricity, compared to the regional average of 66% and the EU27+ average of 86%.

136 Montenegro scored 45% for transparency, compared to the regional average of 42% and the EU27+ average of 65%.

137 Serbia scored 28% for key enablers, compared to the regional average of 23% and the EU27+ average of 61%.

138 This includes 27 European Union member states, as well as Iceland, Norway, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Albania, and North Macedonia.

Graph 16: EU eGovernment Benchmark 2020: government performance in EU27+ across selected policy priorities
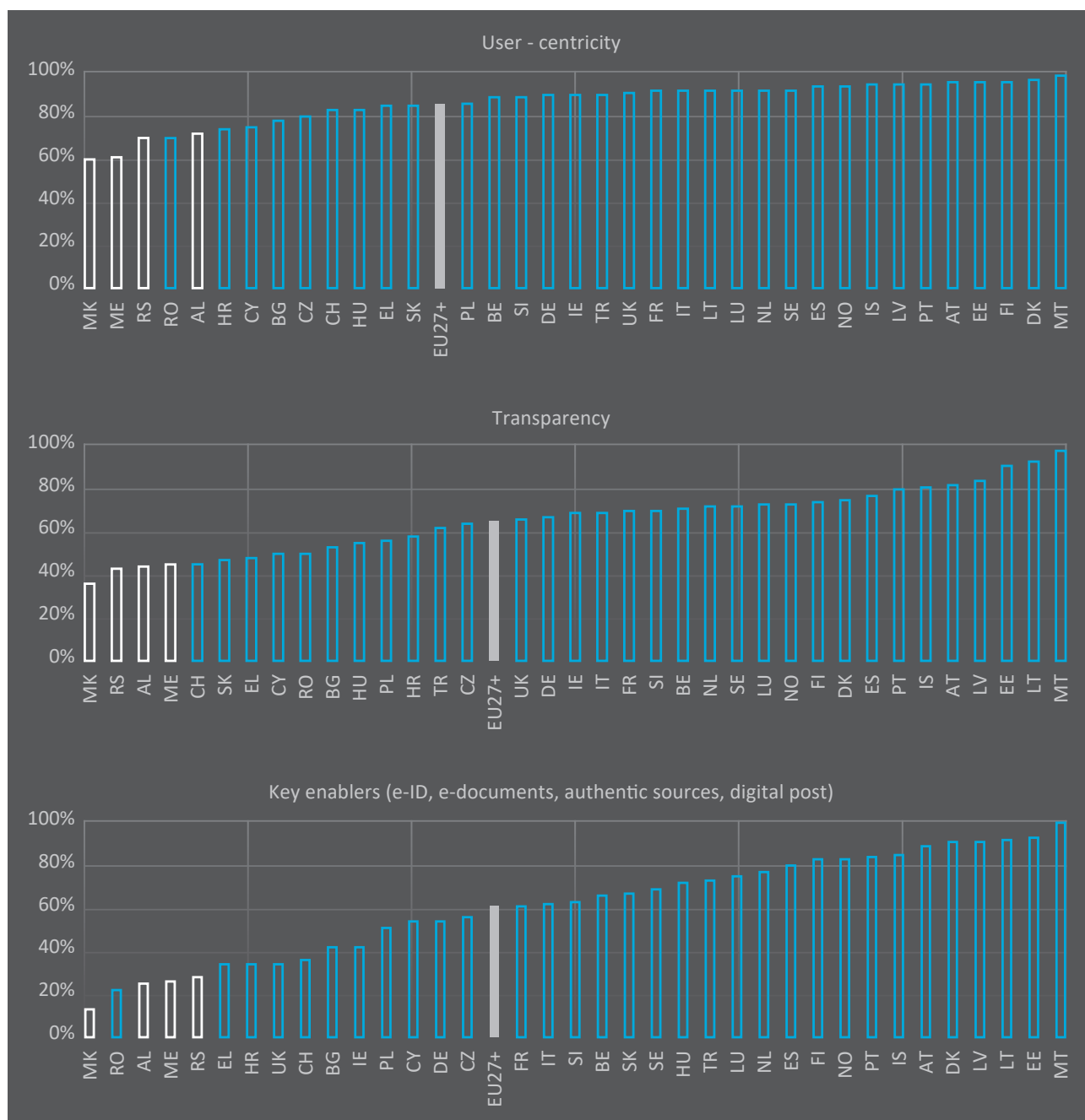
Good practices: Albania's reporting on performance data about digital services

The National Agency for Information Society in **Albania** regularly publishes performance data about digital services offered at the e-Albania portal.[139] This includes relevant statistics on various services, user registrations, electronic payments, usage rates by different profiles (citizens and businesses), and other areas. Such practices are significant for improving transparency in service delivery, enabling monitoring and scrutiny by service users and other stakeholders, as well as informing the government on its own performance and necessary measures for improvement. This information is published through annual reports in PDF format, which represents a positive start, but it appears old-fashioned compared to web-based dashboards currently seen in other European countries,[140] displaying information that is often updated in real time.

139 The latest report is available for 2019. See National Agency for Information Society, "Raport Vjetor Përmbledhës 2019", https://bit.ly/2MthKGu (last accessed 4 February 2021).

140 For example, UK Government performance dashboard, available at https://www.gov.uk/performance (last accessed 4 February 2021)

The development and usage of quality management tools in a systematic way continues to be a challenge in the region. A framework or policy to guide quality management in service delivery, including common standards and performance dashboards across the administrations, is mostly lacking. North Macedonia is one of the most advanced administration in this area, as it uses a variety of quality management models,[141] has standards for services and guidelines for their optimisation,[142] and has a law on quality management in public services.[143] In Montenegro and Serbia, quality management usually boils down to individual initiatives by institutions to apply different tools, for instance, TQM (Monstat in Montenegro), CAF (MPALSG in Serbia), and ISO 9001,[144] but it is not entirely clear if and what kinds of quality management tools are systematically promoted and applied in other institutions, specifically focused on providing services. Initial steps have been made in Kosovo, where the Institute of Public Administration started training selected government institutions on how to use CAF.[145] User satisfaction, if measured, is usually done with traditional surveys by individual institutions with limited information as to whether feedback is used for service improvement. In Montenegro, the dominant forms for user feedback collection are traditional bureaucratic channels with complaint books and comment boxes at the premises of service providers.[146] Likewise, there is an absence of systematic monitoring of user satisfaction with service delivery on all levels in BIH.[147]

Practices to avoid: Citizen feedback remains unused

According to SIGMA (2019), the main user feedback tool in **Kosovo** is the e-Box system, "which is an electronic, touch screen enabled feedback device physically installed in government buildings for over-the-counter services, typically in the reception area. The e-Box has been installed in 35 public institutions (no increase from 2017) and over 4 500 transactions of citizen feedback have been given. (…) So far, the e-Box results have not actively been used to inform decisions to improve service delivery."[148]

Finally, the accessibility of administrative services for disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, remains a concern in the region. In all administrations, improvement of the accessibility of services represents a policy objective, but enforcement is often weak, as confirmed by the WeBER survey results on the following pages. The use of electronic services should contribute to increased accessibility, but national portals designed for providing e-services or information on e-services[149] still contain a number of accessibility errors (such as very low colour contrast), as shown by Graph 17.

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141 MISA, Portal for information and monitoring of activities in the field of quality management in public administration, http://kvalitet.mioa.gov.mk/ (last accessed 4 February 2021).

142 European Commission (2020), Commission Staff Working Document: North Macedonia 2020 Report, Brussels, 6.10.2020 SWD(2020) 351 final p. 16

143 Law on the introduction of a quality management system and the common framework for evaluation of operation and services of state administration, consolidated text, available at: https://bit.ly/3no0XlV (last accessed 4 February 2021)

144 SIGMA Monitoring Report 2019 Montenegro, op. cit., p. 15; OECD/SIGMA, "Monitoring Report: The Principles of Public Administration Serbia", 2019, p. 44, https://bit.ly/39OudNN (last accessed 5 February 2021).

145 SIGMA Monitoring Report 2019 Kosovo*, op. cit., p. 16.

146 SIGMA Monitoring Report 2019 Montenegro, op. cit., p. 14.

147 European Commission, "Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020 Report", op. cit., p. 15.

148 SIGMA Monitoring Report 2019 Kosovo*, op. cit., p. 16.

149 E-Albania portal https://e-albania.al/, eGovernment Portal of Montenegro http://www.euprava.me/, National e-Services Portal in North Macedonia https://uslugi.gov.mk/, eUprava in Serbia https://www.euprava.gov.rs/, and State Portal in Kosovo https://www.rks-gov.net (last accessed 5 February 2021)

Graph 17: Accessibility errors and alerts found on nationwide portals for providing e-services or relevant information
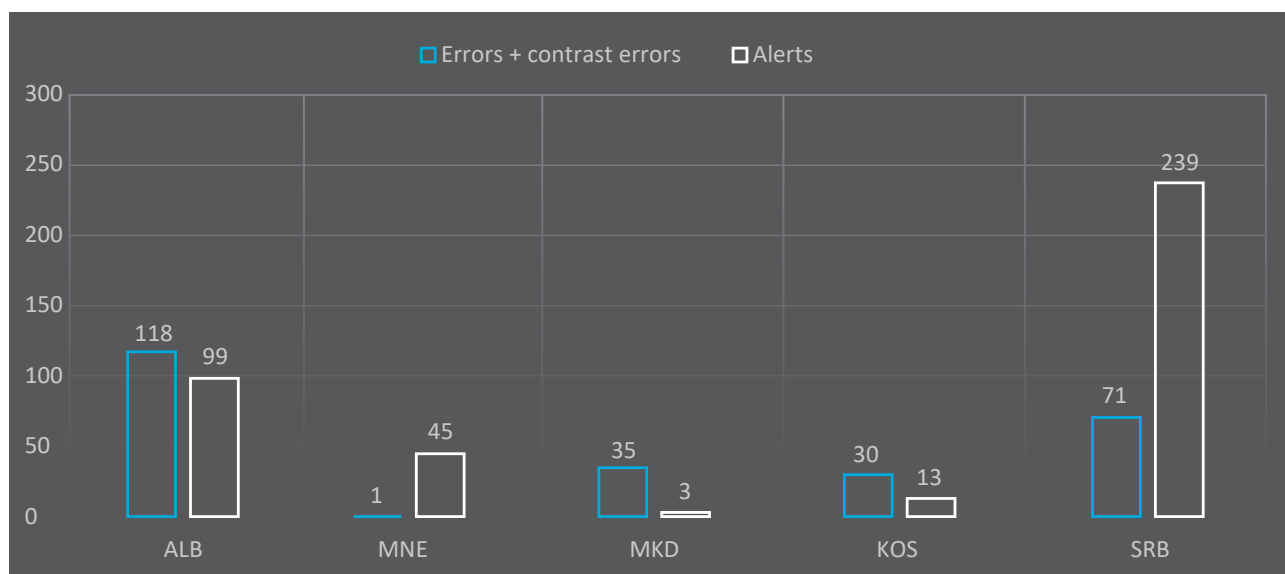
Source: Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool, https://wave.webaim.org/. Errors mostly relate to missing alternative text, very low contrast, empty form labels, and empty or redundant links and buttons.

To additionally facilitate the accessibility of public services, most regional administrations are working to establish physical one-stop shops at the local level, but the quality and availability of the services provided remains to be studied. Moreover, some administrations lack more detailed criteria for establishing such facilities. At the time of writing of this report, 14 one-stop shops had been established in municipalities across Serbia (under the Law on General Administrative Procedure),[150] 16 in Albania[151] and two[152] in North Macedonia (with an additional two coming soon). In BIH, one-stop shops only exist in the Republika Srpska entity.[153] Serbia, on the other hand, despite progress in the quantity of one-stop shops, still lacks a bylaw that would prescribe conditions and criteria for establishing them and govern the cooperation of competent authorities. Likewise, the first one-stop shop in Kosovo was inaugurated in March 2020 (for the Prizren Municipality) "despite the [initial] lack of clarity regarding key questions, such as who sets the standards of service, what services should be provided as a minimum, and how and by whom the service desks will be staffed and the work with individual service providers in the back office organised".[154] The multiplication of one-stop shops without established standards and evaluation can aggravate accessibility issues and contribute to widening the gap between needs and reality.

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150   Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Republic of Serbia, "Od danas i u Staroj Pazovi jedinstveno upravno mesto" [As of today, a single administrative point in Stara Pazova as well], 28 December 2020, https://bit.ly/3rs1vZ5 (accessed 4 February 2021).

151   ADISA, "Raporti i monitorimit të strategjisë", 2020, p. 17, https://bit.ly/3oN1VHt (last accessed 4 February 2021).

152   In the capital of Skopje and the city of Tetovo.

153   European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2020 Report, op. cit., p. 15.

154   SIGMA Monitoring Report 2019 Kosovo*, op. cit., p. 17.

VI.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

Under the Service Delivery area of PAR, three SIGMA Principles are monitored.

> **Principle 1:** Policy for citizen-oriented state administration is in place and applied;
>
> **Principle 3:** Mechanisms for ensuring the quality of public services are in place;
>
> **Principle 4:** The accessibility of public services is ensured.

From the perspective of civil society and the wider public, these principles bear the most relevance in their addressing the outward-facing aspects of administration that are crucial for the daily provision of administrative services and contact with the administration. In this sense, these are the principles most relevant to the quality of everyday life of citizens.

The approach to monitoring these principles relies, firstly, on public perceptions of service delivery policy, including how receptive administrations are to redesigning administrative services based on citizen feedback. This is complemented with civil society's perceptions about distinct aspects of service delivery. Moreover, approaches to the selected principles go beyond mere perceptions, exploring aspects of existence, online availability, and the accessibility of information administrations provide on services.

Four indicators were used, two fully measured with perception data (perceptions from civil society and the public) and two by using a combination of perception and publicly available data. The public perception survey employed three-stage probability sampling targeting the public. It focused on citizen-oriented service delivery in practice, covering various aspects of awareness, efficiency, digitalisation, and feedback mechanisms.[155] This chapter mainly presents the results for the entire sample and in some cases includes data of a sub-sample, for example, of respondents that have used the services in the last two years.

Easy access to administrative services has been especially important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since public perception survey was implemented during the pandemic, citizens were also asked additional questions on how interested they were to explore more about electronic services since the outbreak and how frequently they have used them during the pandemic. Perception data from these questions were not used for measuring indicator values.

In the measurement of the accessibility of administrative services for vulnerable groups and in remote areas, data from a survey of civil society and a focus group with selected CSOs were used,[156] the latter for complementing the survey data with qualitative findings. The existence of feedback mechanisms was explored by combining public perception data and online data for a sample of five services.[157] Finally, the websites of providers of the same sampled services were analysed to collect information on their accessibility and prices.

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155 Perceptions are explored using a survey targeting the public (aged 18 and older) in the Western Balkans. The public perception survey employed multi-stage probability sampling and was administered through a combination of computer-assisted web and telephone interviewing (CAWI and CATI), using a standardised questionnaire through omnibus surveys in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia from 5 May to 30 May 2020. More information is available in the Methodology Appendix.

156 The survey of CSOs was administered through an anonymous, online questionnaire. More information is available in the Methodology Appendix.

157 The five services included were 1) property registration, 2) company (business) registration 3) vehicle registration 4) the issuing of personal documents (passports and ID cards), and 5) value added tax (VAT) declaration and payment for companies.

VI.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 1: POLICY FOR CITIZEN-ORIENTED STATE ADMINISTRATION IS IN PLACE AND APPLIED

The PAR Monitor approaches this principle from the perspective of public perceptions about administrations' citizen orientation, using the indicator "Public perception of state administration's citizen orientation" (SD_P1_I1). This indicator comprises 11 elements.

Table 32: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for SD_P1_I1 "Public perception of state administration's citizen orientation"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Citizens are aware of government administrative simplification initiatives or projects	2	2	1	2	1	1	2
E2. Citizens confirm that administrative simplification initiatives or projects of the government have improved service delivery	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
E3. Citizens confirm that dealing with the administration has become easier	4	4	2	4	2	2	4
E4. Citizens confirm that time needed to obtain administrative services has decreased	4	4	2	4	2	2	4
E5. Citizens consider that administration is moving towards digital government	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
E6. Citizens are aware of the availability of e-services	2	2	1	1	2	1	2
E7. Citizens are knowledgeable about ways on how to use e-services	2	1	1	2	2	2	2
E8. Citizens use e-services	4	0	0	0	2	2	2
E9. Citizens consider e-services to be user-friendly	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
E10. Citizens confirm that the administration seeks feedback from them on how administrative services can be improved	2	1	0	2	1	1	1
E11. Citizens confirm that the administration uses their feedback on how administrative services can be improved	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Total points	**32**	**26**	**18**	**27**	**24**	**23**	**29**
Indicator value 2019/2020[158]	**0-5**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**5**
Indicator value 2017/2018		3	1	4	3	3	4

The overall indicator results are encouraging, with most administrations achieving high values on the five-point progress scale. Serbian citizens appear the most satisfied in the region with how the state administration applies a citizen-oriented approach to providing public services. The second most positive results are reported in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Public perceptions in BIH, on the other hand, are the least positive on this matter.

More than half of Western Balkan inhabitants (58%) recognise the efforts of their governments to simplify administrative procedures for citizens and businesses. The visibility of such efforts appears to be on the rise, as an increase of 10 percentage points is identified as compared to the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle. On the

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158 Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-11 points = 1; 12-17 points = 2; 18-22 points =3; 23-27 points = 4; 28-32 points = 5

national level, the highest recognition is found in Serbia, Kosovo, and Albania (70%, 70%, and 66% respectively), as opposed to BIH, where citizens saw least progress (37%). Among citizens who have interacted with administrations to receive services over the past two years, levels of agreement are even higher, averaging 65%, and ranging from 85% in Kosovo to 42% in BIH.

Chart 32: Citizen perceptions on the statement "In the past two years, there have been efforts or initiatives by the government to make administrative procedures simpler for citizens and businesses" (%)
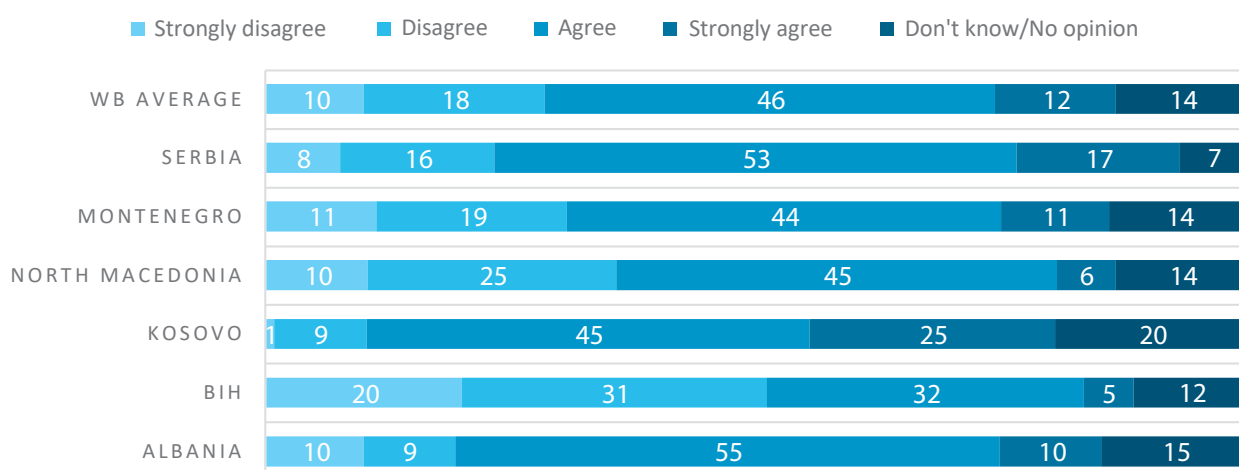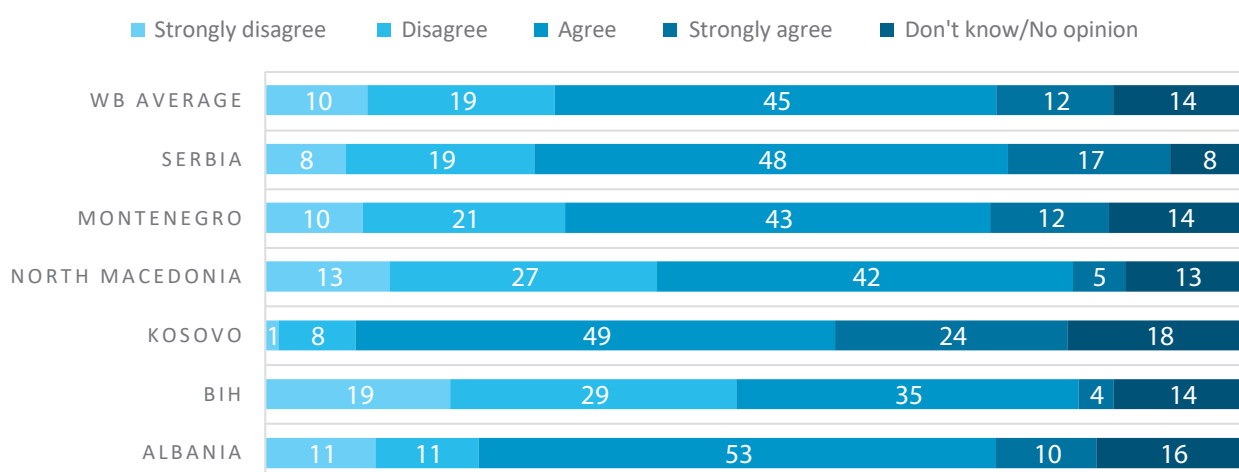

Note: All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.

Particularly positive are perceptions of whether government efforts to simplify administrative procedures have brought improvement in service delivery. Among citizens who noted simplification initiatives,[159] almost 9 out of 10 (89%) believe that such government activity has led to better service delivery, up from 83% in the previous monitoring cycle. Most satisfied are respondents in Kosovo (97%) and Albania (94%), and least satisfied, although still notably positive, are citizens of BIH (78%).

Western Balkan citizens also find that that dealing with their administrations has become easier for them in the past two years. More than half (57%) agree with this statement, which shows noteworthy progress since the baseline monitoring, when the agreement rate was 43%. In contrast, less than a third (29%) tend to disagree with this statement, while 14% could not share their view on this topic. Whereas dealing with administrations is reportedly easiest for citizens in Kosovo (72%), this is less the case for BIH citizens (39%), although, even there, positive public opinion has increased since the 2017/2018 survey (by 11 percentage points). On the regional level, of those who have interacted with administrations in the past two years, on average nearly two thirds (65%) agree that this has become easier for them. The agreement rate of this sub-sample in Kosovo goes as high as 89%, up 10 percentage points since 2017/2018.

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159 Those who responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to the preceding statement ("In the past two years, there have been efforts or initiatives by the government to make administrative procedures simpler for citizens and businesses"), n = 3534.

Chart 33: Citizen perceptions on the statement "In my own experience, dealing with the administration has become easier in the past two years" (%)

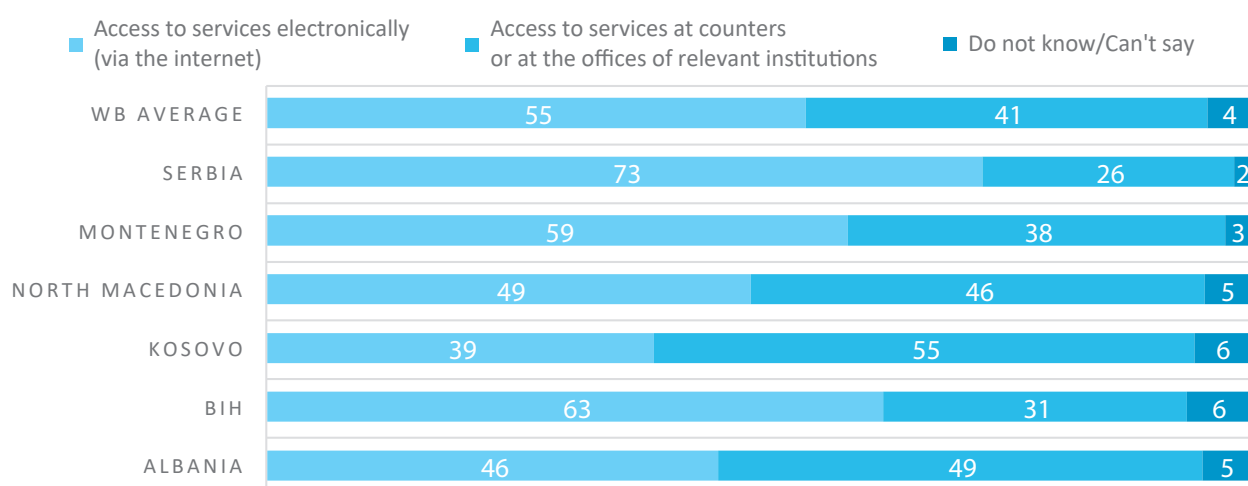|	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know/No opinion
WB AVERAGE	10	19	45	12	14
SERBIA	8	19	48	17	8
MONTENEGRO	10	21	43	12	14
NORTH MACEDONIA	13	27	42	5	13
KOSOVO	1	8	49	24	18
BIH	19	29	35	4	14
ALBANIA	11	11	53	10	16

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Additionally, citizens recognize that interaction with administrations has become swifter and more efficient. More than half of the region's population (57%) believe that it takes less time to obtain administrative services than was the case two years ago. This is progress compared with the 46% who agreed in the previous monitoring cycle. While less than a third (30%) disagrees, 14% opted not to answer. There is an evident increase in affirmative answers in each part of the region. Kosovo remains the most positive, with seven out of ten respondents (71%) agreeing with the statement, followed by Serbia (68%), and Albania (62%). Citizens of BIH continued to be the most skeptical, with half of the population (50%) disagreeing.

Digital government transformation in the region has become progressively more visible to the public. Close to seven out of ten WB citizens (69%) show awareness of government efforts to digitalise the work of public administrations in the past two years, while only 19% do not, and 12% have no opinion. Yet again, statistics reveal a generally positive trend, increasing by 10 percentage points compared to the baseline PAR monitor. At the national level, Serbian citizens now show the highest recognition of government digitalisation efforts, with four out of five (81%) answering affirmatively. High agreement rates dominate in all other parts of the region as well, ranging from 50% in BIH to 74% in Kosovo. Among the citizens who interacted with administrations over the past year, the average agreement rate for this question is slightly higher in the region (73%), going up to 87% in Kosovo.

Public perception survey further focused on e-services. A notable finding is that more than half of the region's population (55%) prefers to access services through digital channels as opposed to "analogue" ones. The strongest support for using digital channels is found in Serbia (73%), followed by BIH (63%) and Montenegro (59%). This represents additional encouragement for administrations to push forward in digital government reform. One should not neglect, however, that still more than a third (41%) of WB citizens prefer to access services at counters or offices of relevant institutions. This preference is especially prominent in Kosovo (55%). In North Macedonia and Albania, citizens have the most divided opinions in the region. While in the former, 49% is pro-digital and 46% pro-analogue, in the latter 46% is pro-digital and 49% pro-analogue. Such findings make it clear that in addition to the digitalisation of services, improving traditional forms of service delivery is equally important, as populations still rely on them heavily.

Chart 34: Citizen perceptions on the statement "What ways of accessing administrative services would you prefer using?" (%)

Legend:
- Access to services electronically (via the internet)
- Access to services at counters or at the offices of relevant institutions
- Do not know/Can't say

	Electronically	At counters	Do not know/Can't say
WB AVERAGE	55	41	4
SERBIA	73	26	2
MONTENEGRO	59	38	3
NORTH MACEDONIA	49	46	5
KOSOVO	39	55	6
BIH	63	31	6
ALBANIA	46	49	5

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Western Balkan citizens are becoming more aware that their governments offer digital administrative services. This is one of the biggest observed changes in public perceptions regarding service delivery as compared to the results of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, as the awareness rate in this area in the region increased by as much as 20 percentage points (from 41% in the previous cycle to 61% in 2020). Nevertheless, a significant 39% of respondents remain unaware of administrations' e-services. At the national level, Albanian citizens are the most informed (74%), while those of Kosovo are the least (54%). BIH marks the largest improvement in awareness of e-services: from 19% in the previous cycle to as 55 in this cycle%.

Furthermore, of WB citizens who know that their administrations offer digital services, 72% are informed on how to use them while 27% are uninformed. As in the previous cycle, Serbian citizens continue to be the best informed (89%), while citizens of Albania and BIH emerge as the least informed, even if over a half are informed (58% in each).

However, the actual use of e-services is low across the region. More than half of the region's population with some knowledge about the use of e-services reported that they had used them rarely or never (61%) in the past two years, as opposed to 39% who had used them sometimes or often. Only in Serbia more than half of respondents are frequent digital service users (58%).[160] In contrast, the lowest frequency of use of e-services (in other words, rarely or never) is reported in Kosovo (75%), BIH (73%) and Albania (71%).

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160 Including responses of "Sometimes" and "Often".

Chart 35: Citizen perceptions on the statement "Thinking about the past two years, how often have you used e-services of the administration?" (%)
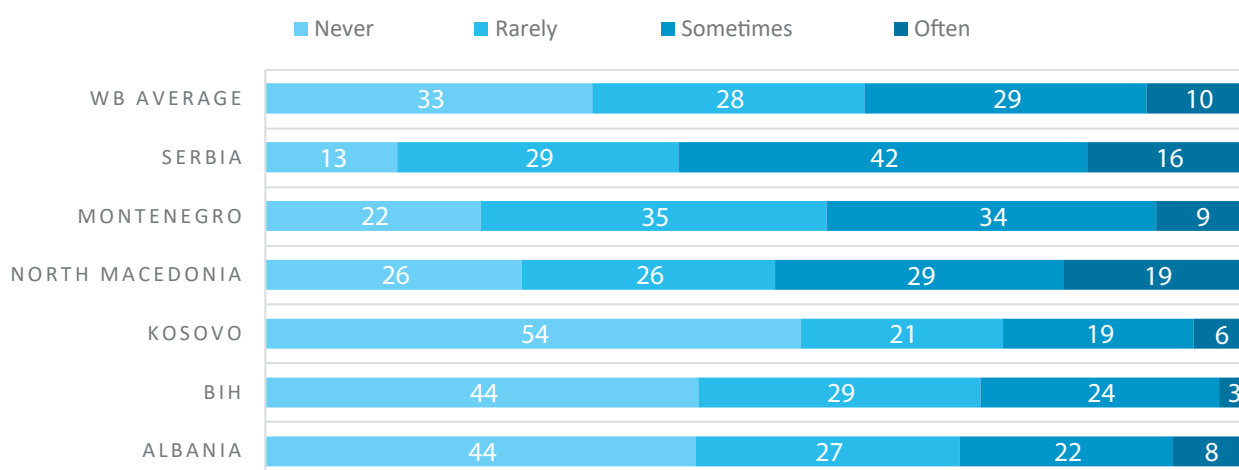
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 3316 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*
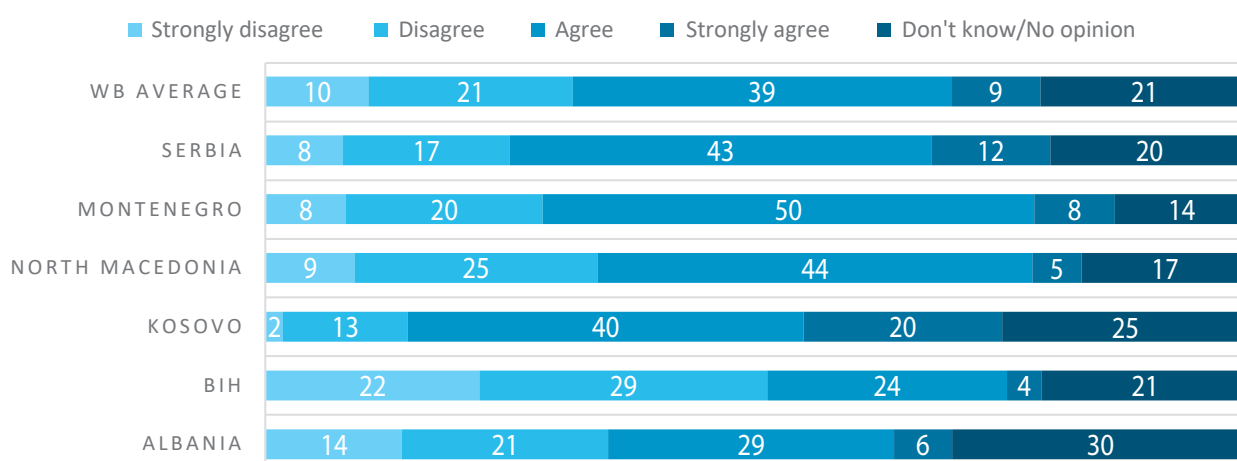
Finally, 4 out of 10 WB citizens who used online services in the past two years confirm that they "always" managed to obtain the service in the end. This proportion varies from 26% in BIH to 47% in Serbia. On the other hand, more than four fifths of those who used e-services (82%) rate them as either easy or very easy to use, an equal perception as in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle. Positive assessments dominate in all parts of the region, ranging from 70% in Albania to 87% in Kosovo.

Western Balkan citizens are not as convinced that administrations have proactively sought their proposals on how to improve administrative services in the past two years. Less than half of respondents (48%) agreed to this statement, as compared to 31% who disagreed and 21% who did not hold a view on this topic. Yet, this level of agreement marks an increase of 17 percentage points from the baseline PAR monitor. Looking at the national level, agreement rates vary from 28% in BIH to 61% in Kosovo. Albanian citizens appear most undecided, with 35% agreeing (down from 44% in the previous cycle) and disagreeing respectively, and 30% of those who could not provide an answer.

Among those who agree that their administration has asked for citizens' proposals on how to improve services,[161] a large share (85%) also believe that governments have used such proposals to improve administrative services, marking an increase of 7 percentage points from the previous monitoring cycle. At the national level, the highest support (95%) is recorded in Kosovo. The lowest, but nevertheless favourable, percentages are recorded in BIH (74%) and North Macedonia (78%).

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161   Those who responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to the preceding statement ("In the past two years, the administration has asked for the citizens' proposals on how to improve administrative services"), n = 2896.
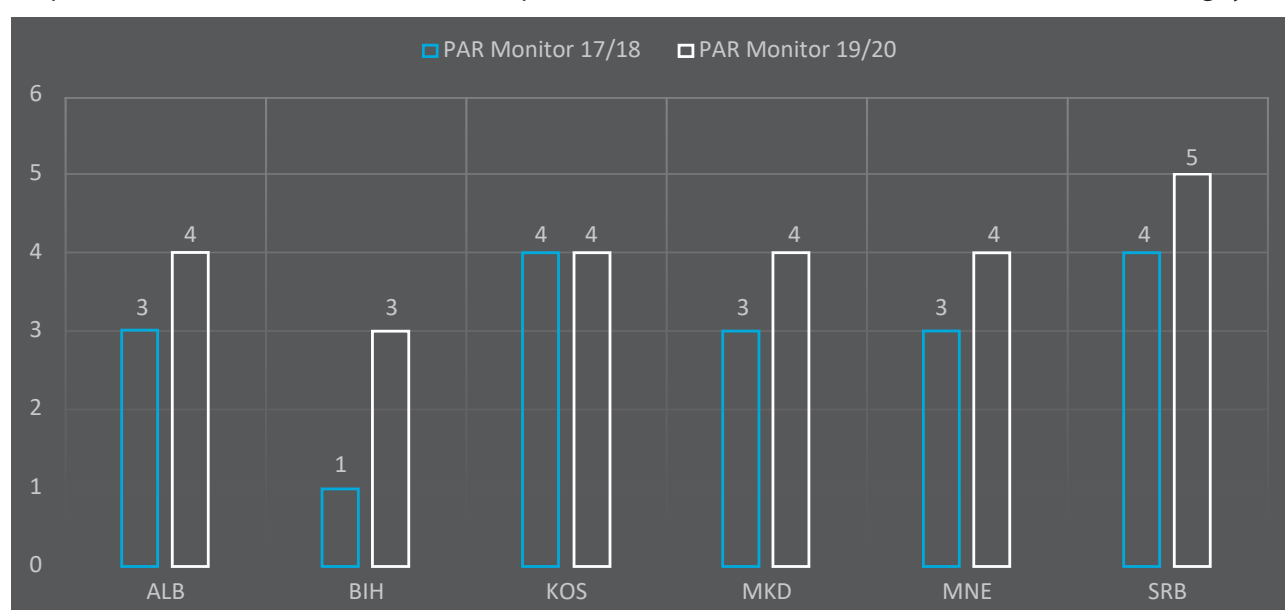
Chart 36: Citizen perceptions on the statement "In the past two years, the administration has asked for citizens' proposals on how to improve administrative services" (%)

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Don't know/No opinion

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know/No opinion
WB AVERAGE	10	21	39	9	21
SERBIA	8	17	43	12	20
MONTENEGRO	8	20	50	8	14
NORTH MACEDONIA	9	25	44	5	17
KOSOVO	2	13	40	20	25
BIH	22	29	24	4	21
ALBANIA	14	21	29	6	30

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

There has been improvement in public perception in the entire region compared to the baseline monitoring. Based on collected responses, the region recorded progress in making state administrations more citizen oriented. Only Serbia scored the maximum indicator value, making a jump from 4 to 5 on a five-point scale. A reason for this is a significant improvement in public perceptions, especially regarding whether dealing with administrations has become easier, if the time needed to obtain administrative services has decreased, and if citizens are aware of e-services. As the Serbian government has set the increase of efficiency in public service delivery as its priority since 2017,[162] findings show that political will and commitment to reform can produce visible results in public opinion. Likewise, BIH marked a 2-point jump on the indicator value scale, from 1 to 3, due to the increasingly positive public perception overall. Two questions that remained without points, however, relate to whether citizens have used e-services and whether administrations have asked for citizens proposals on how to improve services.

Graph 18: Indicator values for SD_P1_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

Legend: □ PAR Monitor 17/18 □ PAR Monitor 19/20

	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
PAR Monitor 17/18	3	1	4	3	3	4
PAR Monitor 19/20	4	3	4	4	4	5

162 Programme of the Government of the Republic of Serbia of the Prime Minister Candidate Ana Brnabić, 2017, p. 60, https://bit.ly/3tUKdoP (last accessed 26 April 2021).

PRINCIPLE 3: MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES ARE IN PLACE

PAR Monitor approaches Principle 3 of the service delivery area from the perspective of citizens' views on the quality of public services. It does so by combining results of a public perception survey with the analysis of websites of service providers to determine the availability of information on citizen feedback. In the public perception survey, citizens were asked about the possibilities they have to provide feedback on the quality of services, about the ease of use of the channels for providing feedback, about their and civil society's role in monitoring service delivery and if such efforts result in improved service delivery. The results of these questions were used in the indicator "Public perception and availability of information on citizens' feedback regarding the quality of administrative services" (indicator SD_P3_I1), which comprises six elements.

Table 33: Element scores and indicator values for SD_P3_I1 "Public perception and availability of information on citizens' feedback regarding the quality of administrative services"

| Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Citizens consider they have the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of administrative services	2	1	1	2	1	2	2
E2. Citizens perceive feedback mechanisms as easy to use	4	2	2	2	2	2	2
E3. Citizens perceive themselves or civil society as involved in monitoring and assessment of administrative services	4	0	0	2	2	2	2
E4. Citizens perceive that administrative services are improved as a result of monitoring and assessment by citizens	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
E5. Basic information regarding citizens' feedback on administrative services is publicly available	4	0	0	2	2	0	0
E6. Advanced information regarding citizens' feedback on administrative services is publicly available	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total points	**20**	**7**	**7**	**13**	**11**	**10**	**10**
Indicator value 2019/2020[163]	**0-5**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	1	3	2	2	2

The previous indicator observed whether survey respondents recognise any proactive initiative from their administrations seeking citizens' proposals on how to improve service delivery in general. This indicator takes a narrower perspective, by asking citizens if they, as users of public services, are able to provide direct feedback on the quality of specific services they receive. While citizens in the Western Balkans generally recognise their administrations as citizen-oriented, this indicator reveals less enthusiasm regarding feedback mechanisms, i.e., opportunities for user feedback and monitoring of specific administrative services. Nevertheless, overall public perceptions on this topic have improved since the 2017/2018 cycle.

Citizens of the region confirm that they have more possibilities to provide feedback on the quality of individual services they obtain from their administrations. As opposed to the results of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, more people now agree (51%) than disagree (30%) that they have possibilities to provide feedback as service recipients, and 19% do not have an opinion. The rate of respondents agreeing in this area rose 20 percentage points in the last two years, indicating progress in creating feedback mechanisms in service delivery in the region. Looking at the national level, the highest level of agreement remains in Kosovo, where more than two thirds of the population agree (67%, up by almost 30 percentage points). On the other extreme, 50% of the BIH population disagrees, while Albanian public opinion appears the most split, with 36% disagreeing and 32% agreeing and 32% not having an opinion.

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163 Conversion of points: 0-4 points = 0; 5-8 points = 1; 9-11 points = 2; 12-14 points = 3; 15-17 points = 4; 18-20 points = 5.

Out of those who confirmed there were possibilities to provide feedback as users of services,[164] more respondents find such channels easy (48%) than difficult (18%) to use, while 4% do not have a clear opinion.[165] Importantly, almost a third (31%) of respondents have not used feedback channels. Potential issues arising from this finding relate to whether the channels are easily accessible, prominently displayed, well communicated, and proactively promoted by governments, as well as doubts about whether provided feedback would actually be used to improve service provision. In half of the region (Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia), citizens' satisfaction with the user-friendliness of feedback channels is above the regional average, while in the rest of the region satisfaction is lower.

Chart 37: Citizen perceptions on the statement "As a user of administrative services, I have possibilities to give my opinion on the quality of the individual services that I receive (obtain)" (%)
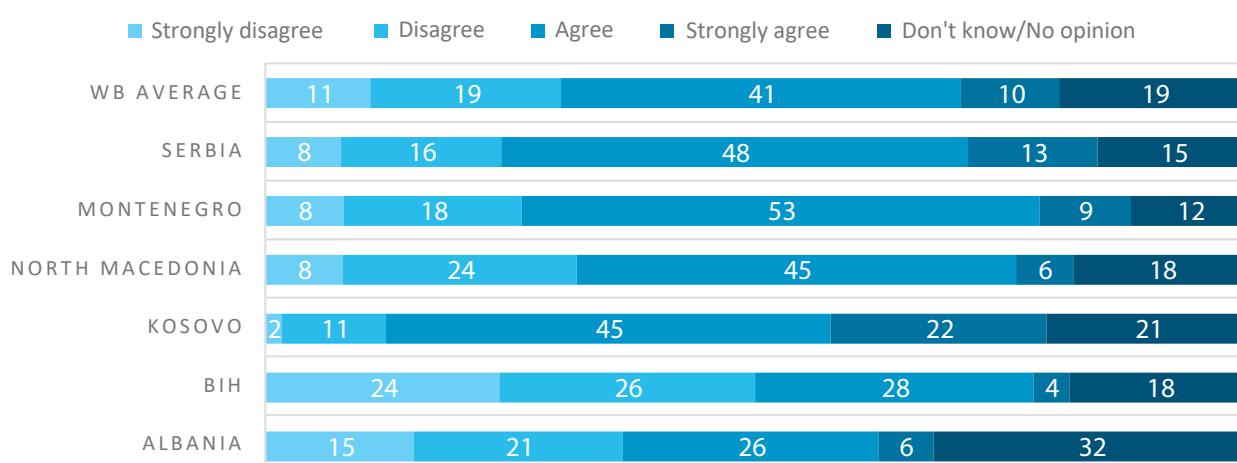
Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 6085 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

There has been a shift in public opinion regarding citizen/CSO involvement in monitoring administrative service delivery. Contrary to the results of the baseline monitoring, there is agreement overall across the region that citizens or civil society have been involved in monitoring service delivery in the past two years. While in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle only a quarter agreed with this statement, this time around 42% agreed with it. On the other hand, close to a third (32%) still disagree and more than a quarter (26%) could not provide their insight (do not have an opinion) on this question. Although these results show that parts of the population have limited awareness of service delivery monitoring initiatives, this awareness has increased since the start of the WeBER monitoring work, as the percentage of people who do not have an opinion dropped from 33%. The most affirmative public opinions come from Kosovo (53%), Serbia (53%), and Montenegro (52%), while BIH is the only case in which more than half disagree (51%).
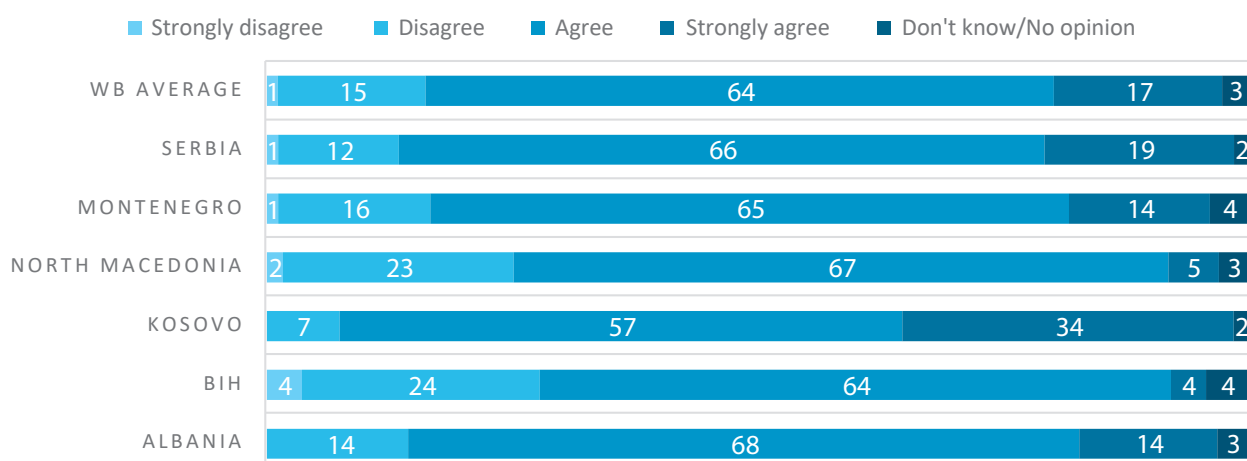
Furthermore, Western Balkans citizens believe that such bottom-up monitoring of service delivery contributes to the actual improvement of administrative services. From those citizens who recognise civil society and citizen initiatives to monitor administrative services,[166] 81% share the opinion that their governments have improved administrative services as a result, identical to the findings of the 2017/2018 survey. This positive view is most prominent in Kosovo (91%), while results in Montenegro, North Macedonia, and BIH are lower than on the regional level.

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164 Those who responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to the preceding statement ("As a user of administrative services, I have possibilities to give my opinion on the quality of the individual services that I receive (obtain)"), n=3083.

165 It should be noted that the 2020 public perception survey included a minor modification to avoid superfluous sub-sampling. Instead of having a question analysing if citizens had actually used the opportunities to provide opinions on the quality of administrative services, the question examining how easy or difficult such channels were to use included an "I have not used them" option.

166 Those who responded "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" to the statement ("In the past two years, citizens or civil society have been involved in the monitoring of administrative services"), n = 2595.

Chart 38: Citizen perceptions on the statement "In the past two years, as a result of such monitoring by citizens or civil society, the government has improved administrative services" (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know/No opinion
WB AVERAGE	1	15	64	17	3
SERBIA	1	12	66	19	2
MONTENEGRO	1	16	65	14	4
NORTH MACEDONIA	2	23	67	5	3
KOSOVO		7	57	34	2
BIH	4	24	64	4	4
ALBANIA		14	68	14	3

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 2595 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

This indicator additionally included review of the websites of the providers of a sample of five administrative services[167] in each administration. The indicator examined public availability of "basic"[168] or "advanced"[169] information on citizens' feedback on the quality of those services.

Basic information on user feedback, such as user satisfaction survey data, is scarce in WB. In most of the region's administrations, such data was found for only one out of the five sampled services: vehicle registrations in Albania, VAT declarations and payments in Montenegro and BIH (at the RS level), business registrations in Serbia, and the issuing of personal documents in BIH (at the FBIH level).[170] In North Macedonia and Kosovo, reports were found for two services in each case, although they were not entirely up to date.[171] Besides basic information on user feedback, Western Balkan administrations also lack more advanced reporting on citizen satisfaction with administrative services, which would include combinations of more than one data source or include data segregated based on gender or other bases. Such information, although slightly outdated, was identified only for two sampled services in Kosovo (property registration and VAT declaration and payment). This finding is identical to the results of the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle. Overall, insufficient and infrequently published information on user satisfaction points to a persistent problem with the quality of feedback loop mechanisms. It further points to lacking responsibility from institutions to first encourage their users to provide feedback and then publish information about the results.

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167 These services being property registration, company (business) registration, vehicle registration, the issuing of personal documents (passports and ID cards), and tax administration (value added tax (VAT) declaration and payment for companies).

168 With data from at least one source, be it an administrative data, survey data, civil society monitoring data, or another credible source.

169 Advanced information refers to any of the three following cases: 1) Data/information on citizens' feedback includes information from at least two different credible sources; 2) Data is segregated based on gender, disabilities, or other relevant issues (such as ethnicity in countries where this relevant, region, urban and rural, and others); 3) Additional analyses are done (such as studies, cross-analyses of data from various sources, or other forms of analysis).

170 Due to the constitutional order in BIH, services are provided at the entity or canton level. In this PAR Monitor, monitoring of service delivery area also included levels below the state level (entity and canton).

171 Vehicle registration and the issuing of personal documents (passports and ID cards) in North Macedonia, and VAT related services and cadastre services in Kosovo.

Practices to avoid: Forgotten or hidden user feedback information

At the beginning of 2020, **Serbia** launched a new, redesigned e-government portal for accessing digital services.[172] The portal provides a better user experience, with updated information for service users, various registration options, and a user-friendly interface. The designers of the new portal, however, omitted displaying users' comments and ratings of individual services, which had existed under some frequently used services on the old portal. The new portal does not allow users the option to leave comments, rate services with stars, or see other reviews, thus discontinuing the previously existing good practice. While some services might be new or redesigned, services such as booking an appointment to submit a request for an ID card or passport remained unchanged. Therefore, whereas the new portal represents progress, its failure to showcase previous comments and to collect and display new user feedback for individual services (at least for those services that have remained the same) is one step back in terms of transparency on user feedback.

Similarly, in **North Macedonia**, the Ministry of the Interior offers a user satisfaction survey on its webpage,[173] but the results of the survey are not easy to access and understand. Those who wish to participate in the survey can select the specific service they want to provide their feedback on, among which are vehicle registration and the issuing of passports and ID cards. The survey results are only revealed after completing the survey, without prior announcement. This means that potential service users, who are not yet ready to provide their own feedback but wish to inform themselves, are not provided information on the satisfaction of other users. Moreover, the results do not specify if they refer to all services available in the survey, or only the particular service selected by the respondent.

Overall, as compared to the baseline monitor from 2017/2018, a decline in the indicator value is marked only in Albania, while the rest of the region showed neither progress nor regression. Lower scores in Albania result from more negative public perception, i.e., less citizens consider feedback channels as easy to use and less citizens believe that citizens or CSOs have been involved in monitoring and assessment of administrative services in the past two years. Kosovo remains a frontrunner in this indicator, with the highest indicator value, due to a highly positive public perception and some extent of publication of user feedback.

Graph19: Indicator values for SD_P3_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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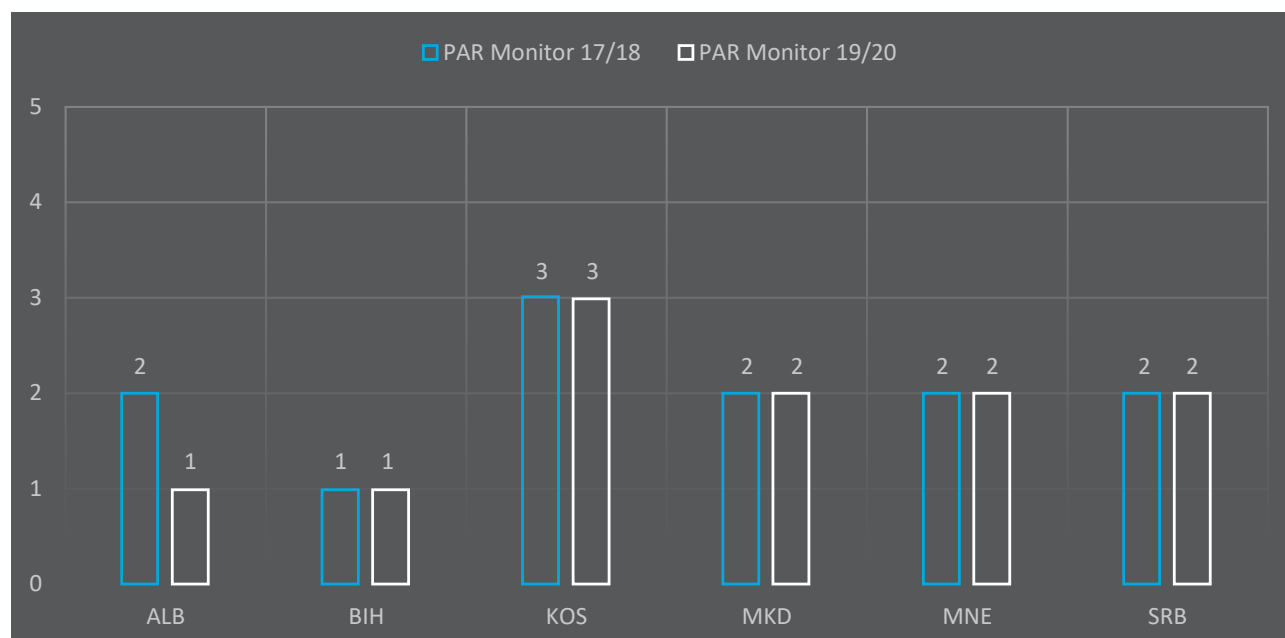
172 eUprava, available at https://euprava.gov.rs/ (last accessed on 5 March 2021).

173 Available at the webpage of the Ministry of the Interior, http://mvr.gov.mk/anketa2/AnketaMk (last accessed on 5 March 2021).

PRINCIPLE 4: THE ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES IS ENSURED

The Accessibility of public services was measured with two indicators, one of which is based on the perceptions of civil society organisations and the other one on the analysis of the websites of the providers for a sample of administrative services.[174] The values for the first indicator which measures "**CSOs' perception of accessibility of administrative services**" (SD_P4_I1) comprises six elements.

Table 34: Element scores and indicator values for SD_P4_I1 "CSOs' perception of accessibility of administrative services"

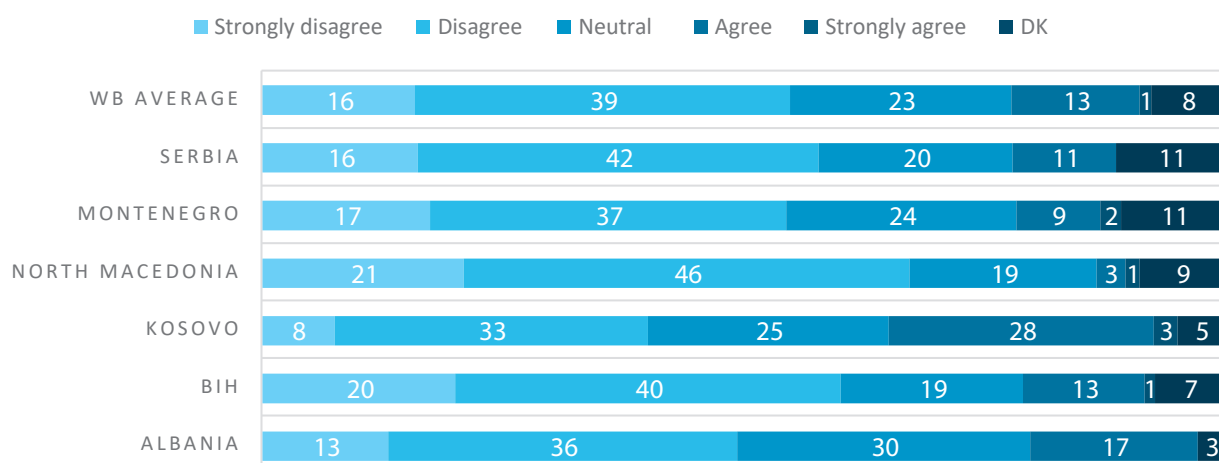| Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. CSOs confirm the adequacy of the territorial network for access to administrative services	4	0	0	2	0	0	0
E2. CSOs confirm that one-stop-shops are made accessible to all	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E3. CSOs consider administrative services to be provided in a manner that meets the individual needs of vulnerable groups	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
E4. CSOs confirm that administrative service providers are trained on how to treat vulnerable groups	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E5. CSOs confirm that the administration provides different channels of choice for obtaining administrative services	2	1	0	1	0	0	1
E6. CSOs confirm that e-channels are easily accessible for persons with disabilities	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**18**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Indicator value 2019/2020[175]	**0-5**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Indicator value 2017/2018		0	0	0	0	0	0

As in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, CSOs held largely negative views regarding the accessibility of administrative services for all the questions asked. These organisations are slightly more positive concerning the variety of channels that can be used to obtain administrative services (such as online, or face-to-face). Negative perceptions, on the other hand, were highest in regard to the questions related to adaptations of service provision to vulnerable groups.

On average, more than half of CSOs (55%) across the region believe that service providers are inadequately territorially distributed, with some citizens not having easy access. Only 14% feel that services are adequately distributed, which is almost the same percentage (15%) as in the baseline PAR Monitor. Dissatisfaction remains highest in North Macedonia, reaching two thirds (67%) of CSOs, while perceptions are the most positive in Kosovo (31%) compared to the rest of the region.

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174 The sampled services as in the indicator 5SD_P3_I1 above.

175 Conversion of points: 0-3 points = 0; 4-6 points = 1; 7-9 points = 2; 10-12 points = 3; 13-15 points = 4; 16-18 points = 5.

Chart 39: Civil society perceptions on the statement "Across the territories of the country, administrative service providers are adequately distributed in such a way that all citizens have easy access" (%)
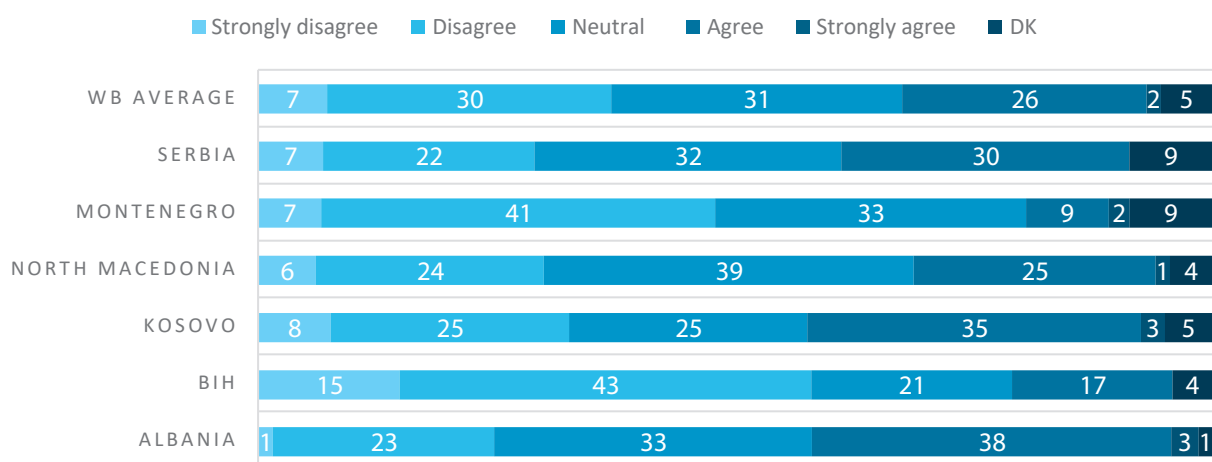
Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	16	39	23	13	1	8
SERBIA	16	42	20	11		11
MONTENEGRO	17	37	24	9	2	11
NORTH MACEDONIA	21	46	19	3	1	9
KOSOVO	8	33	25	28	3	5
BIH	20	40	19	13	1	7
ALBANIA	13	36	30	17		3

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 466 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Looking at the geographic distribution of one-stop shops, as a means to facilitate access to services, perceptions are equally negative. On average, only 12% of CSOs agree that one-stop shops are easily accessible (in terms of their geographic distribution) to all users, whereas half of them disagree and 14% do not have an opinion. BIH organisations remain the most negative, with 68% disagreeing, up by 2 percentage points since the 2017/2018 survey. As two years ago, Albanian CSOs have the most positive opinion (23%), but this figure has dropped by 10 percentage points.

CSOs in the region are slightly more positive about the variety of channels that administrations provide them for obtaining administrative services. More than a quarter on average agree they are offered different channels to choose from (such as in-person and electronic) and 31% are neutral. Nevertheless, more than a third (37%) disagree with this statement. Organisations in Albania and Kosovo appear more satisfied (41% and 38% agreeing, respectively) than the rest of the region. The most negative opinions come from CSOs in BIH (58% disagreeing).

Chart 40: Civil society perceptions on the statement "The public administration provides different channels of choice (in-person, electronic) for obtaining administrative services" (%)

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ DK

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	DK
WB AVERAGE	7	30	31	26	2	5
SERBIA	7	22	32	30		9
MONTENEGRO	7	41	33	9	2	9
NORTH MACEDONIA	6	24	39	25	1	4
KOSOVO	8	25	25	35	3	5
BIH	15	43	21	17		4
ALBANIA	1	23	33	38	3	1

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 466 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

As confirmed by Western Balkan CSOs, administrative service provision remains unfitting to the needs of vulnerable groups. On average, 8% of CSOs state that services are indeed adapted to vulnerable groups (up from 5% in the previous monitoring), while 64% disagree. 20% of CSOs provided a neutral response to this question and 8% did not have an opinion. Responses to this question were the most negative examined in this indicator. Montenegrin organisations show the highest level of dissatisfaction, with only 2% finding service provision adapted to vulnerable groups as opposed to 72% who do not believe this is the case. On the other side, organisations in Albania and Kosovo provide the most positive view, with 10% agreeing.

Chart 41: Civil society perceptions on the statement "Administrative service provision is adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups" (%)
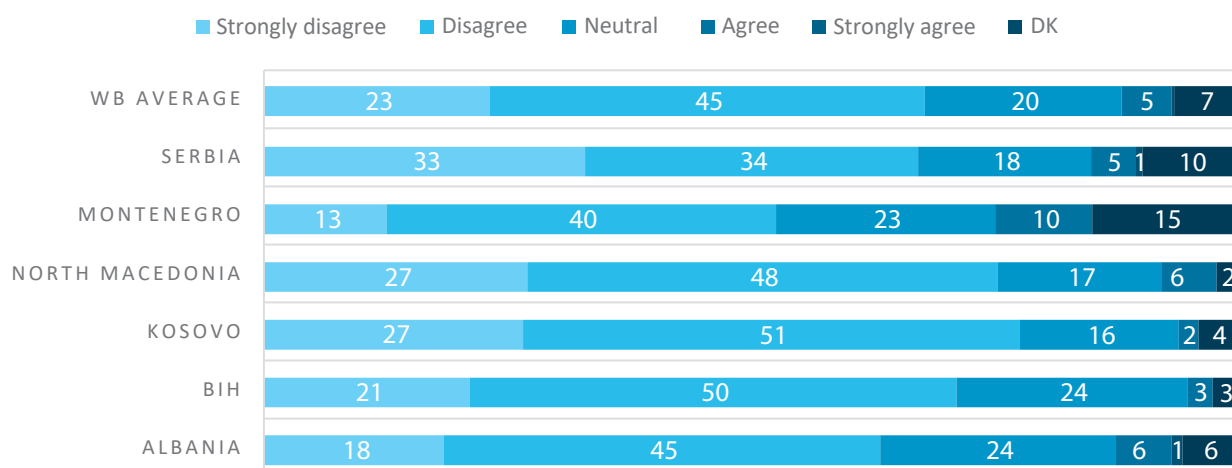

Note: *All results are rounded to the nearest integer. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%. N = 466 and refers to the total number of respondents in the WB.*

Another shortcoming in the area of accessibility relates to the staff working on the provision of administrative services. By and large, the region's organisations consider administrative staff insufficiently trained in how to treat vulnerable service users. While 62% disagree that they are trained, the regional average of agreement is only 7% (up from 5% in the 2017/2018 measurements). Across the region, no surveyed CSOs strongly agree that this is the case, except in Albania, where 14% of CSOs agree and 3% strongly agree. In Montenegro, only 2% of surveyed CSOs confirm that the staff working on administrative service delivery is trained in how to serve vulnerable groups.

Finally, on average six out of 10 Western Balkan CSOs disagree that e-services are easily accessible for vulnerable groups. While only 7% agree, not a single percent of organisations strongly agree on this point. Montenegrin organisations have the most negative opinions in this area (70% disagree), while CSOs in Serbia are the least concerned in the region (48% disagree). The highest level of agreement anywhere in the region amounts to only 10% in Kosovo (the same as in the baseline PAR monitoring cycle).

Comparing the previous and current monitoring cycles, final indicator values remain unchanged, with the score of 0 for all administrations. CSOs' negative perceptions about the accessibility of administrative services remain strong. CSOs across the region are unanimous in their agreement that their governments do not pursue policies to improve the accessibility of services to their citizens, including vulnerable groups of the population. Their general view is that consequently, services remain unequally distributed.

Graph20: Indicator values for SD_P4_I1 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
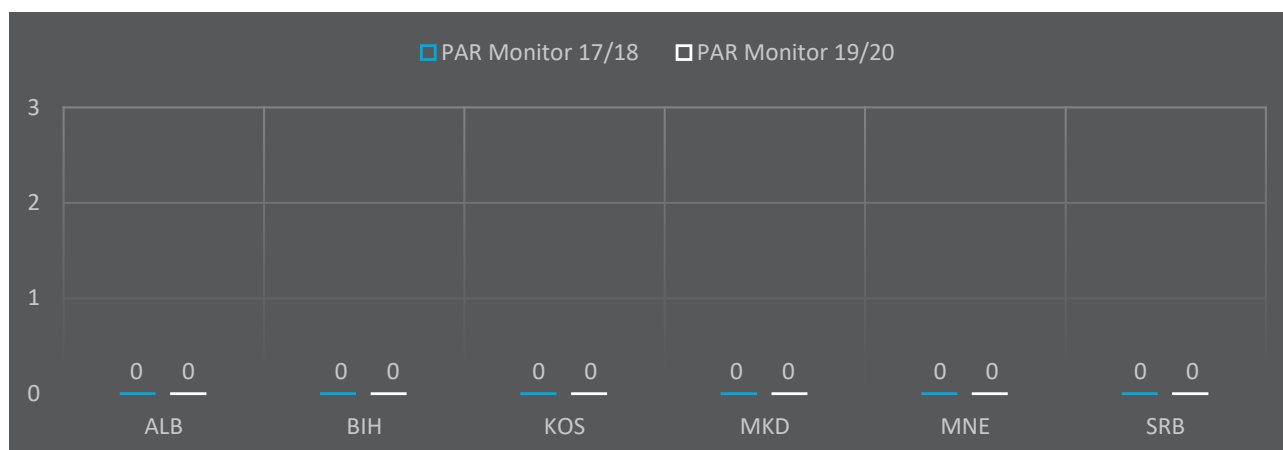
The second accessibility indicator looks at the availability of information regarding the provision of administrative services on the websites of service providers (indicator SD_P4_I2), for the same sample of five services used in the previous indicators in this area. The analysed information also includes prices of administrative services, which should be presented in an accessible manner, with relevant price breakdown and transparency. The indicator relies on seven elements.

Table 35 Element scores and indicator values for SD_P4_I2 "Availability of information regarding the provision of administrative services on the websites of service providers"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Websites of administrative service providers include contact information for provision of services	4	4	2	2	4	4	4
E2. Websites of administrative service providers include basic procedural information on how to access administrative services	4	2	0	2	4	2	4
E3. Websites of administrative service providers include citizen-friendly guidance on accessing administrative services	2	1	0	1	1	0	1
E4. Websites of administrative service providers include information on the rights and obligations of users	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
E5. Individual institutions providing administrative services at the central level publish information on the price of services offered	4	4	2	4	4	2	4
E6. The information on the prices of administrative services differentiates between e-services and in-person services	2	1	0	0	1	0	1
E7. Information on administrative services is available in open data formats	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points	**20**	**14**	**5**	**11**	**16**	**10**	**16**
Indicator value 2019/2020[176]	**0-5**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**4**	**2**	**4**
Indicator value 2017/2018		4	1	1	4	2	3

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176 Conversion of points: 0-4 points = 0; 5-8 points = 1; 9-11 points = 2; 12-14 points =3; 15-17 points = 4; 18-20 points = 5.

Complete, up-to-date, accurate, and easily attainable information about administrative services is essential for any service seeker. Administrative service providers across the region, however, vary in making such information available on their websites. In the period of measurement (from May to June of 2020), administrations in North Macedonia and Serbia, followed by Albania, demonstrated the highest efforts in informing service users, while better information provision practices are yet to be seen in the rest of the region.

Service providers across the region mostly publish basic contact information related to specific services (such as e-mail addresses and phone numbers of relevant institutions and units). Complete information for all five sampled services could be found in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. In BIH and Montenegro, such information is available for the majority of sampled services, while in Kosovo service users cannot easily find complete contact information for vehicle registration, issuing IDs and passports, and business registration.

Basic procedural information on how to access administrative services is less easily available.[177] In parts of the region, users of administrative services face difficulties finding, for example, information on how to access services or what steps they entail. Complete information is missing for one service in Serbia and North Macedonia (vehicle registration in both cases), and two services in Kosovo. In the rest of the region, procedural information is even more difficult to find.

Even in cases where procedural information is available, it is usually not followed by audio-visual guidance to support users through procedures. Service users in the Western Balkans therefore lack simple, citizen-friendly information and guidance to help them obtain administrative services.[178] Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia stand out by providing such content for three out of five sampled services (each case including business registration and VAT declaration and payment as a common denominator). In the rest of the region, user manuals or audio-visual materials exist in 1 or 2 cases per administration.

On a more positive note, service users can typically find specific information on their rights and obligations, more precisely with regards to the documents and information that need to be submitted to obtain various services. This is the case in North Macedonia and Serbia for the entire sample of services, in Albania and Montenegro for four out of five, and in BIH for three out of five sampled services. Regardless of whether this is the case for three, four, or five services, all five of the abovementioned administrations publish such information for vehicle registration, issuing ID cards and passports, and VAT declaration and payment services.

> ### Good practices: Region's tax authorities exemplary in citizen-friendly guidance
>
> Out of the five sampled services observed in PAR Monitor, tax authorities stand out in **all the administrations of the region** in terms of their publishing of simple, audio-visual guidance for accessing administrative services. This practice mostly entails publishing illustrated user manuals for filling in and submitting tax returns electronically, as well as instructional videos on how to use electronic services step-by-step, supported by concrete examples. The YouTube channel of **BIH's Indirect Tax Agency**, for instance, hosts simple videos guiding users on registering on the e-portal and submitting VAT reports.[179]

An equally positive finding is that most administrative service providers across the region publish information about service fees. Prices for obtaining services are available for all sampled services in North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia, while in the remaining administrations they were found for some of the sample. But price information differentiating between obtaining services in person and in an electronic form is very limited, however, as most sampled services have not yet been digitalised. Only in Albania is such information found for most of the sample, while in Montenegro and Kosovo there is no such information.

Finally, in line with the mainstreaming approach for open data, which the PAR Monitor methodology applies, the indicator looked at whether information on services is available for download in machine readable formats,

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177 Minimum procedural information is considered to be, descriptions of services, where and how to obtain them, and original forms (such as downloadable files or online forms).

178 Visual presentations and audio-visual guidance intended to help citizens in requesting and obtaining services.

179 YouTube, "UINO BIH" (Indirect Tax Agency of BIH), available at https://bit.ly/3vywKUr (last accessed 5 March 2021).

free of charge. The practice of offering open data on service provision remains absent across the region as in the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle.

From a comparative perspective, overall results point to improvements in Serbia and Kosovo since the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, reflected in scores one point higher on the five-point scale. Montenegro and BIH, on the other hand, have stagnated in their availability of information about administrative service delivery, while North Macedonia retains its high score. Only Albania notes a decline, mostly because property registration services scored worse in four out of the seven examined types of information.

Graph21: Indicator values for SD_P4_I2 – comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
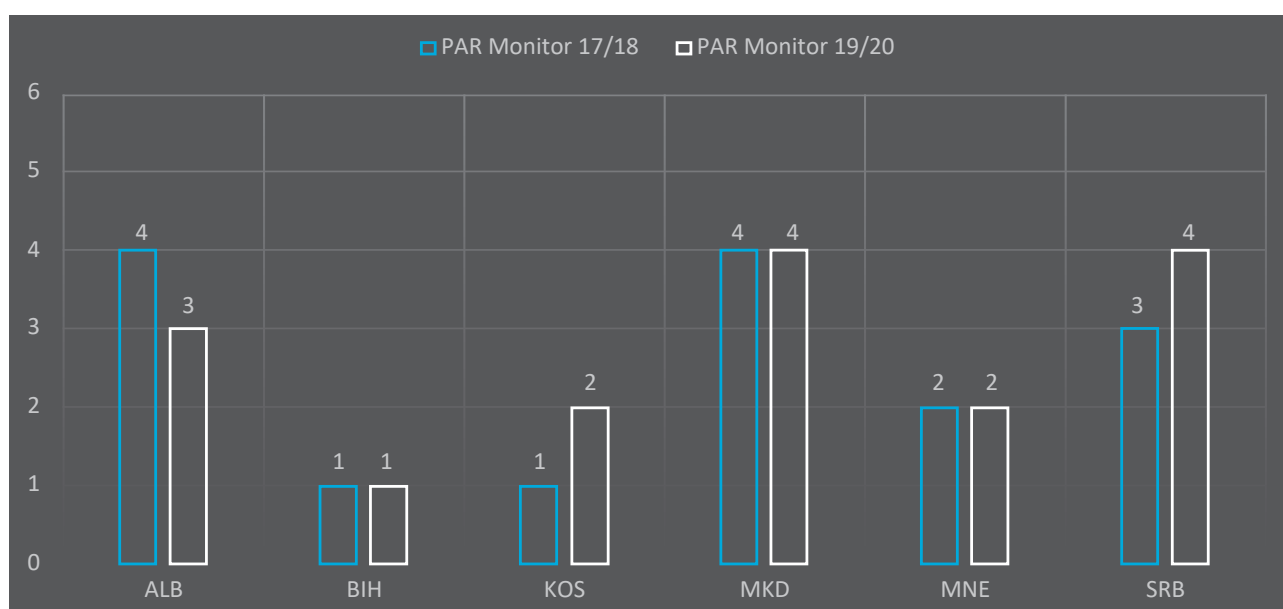
VI.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE SERVICE DELIVERY AREA

WeBER's approach to monitoring administrative service delivery is citizen-oriented, relying to a large extent on public and civil society perceptions about the availability and accessibility of services. Overall, results show a positive trend in public opinion across the region as compared to the 2017/2018 monitoring cycle, with a significant increase in satisfaction in some areas. Administrations' efforts at improving service delivery have generally become more visible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which easy and especially contactless access to administrative services has become ever more important.

In the area of citizen-oriented administration, public perception findings show a positive overall trend. More than half of Western Balkan citizens believe that dealing with their administrations has become easier in the past two years. They consider that it takes less time to obtain administrative services and they recognise the efforts of their governments to simplify administrative procedures. Additionally, WB citizens are increasingly aware of governments' efforts to digitalise the work of public administration and to offer digital services. On the other hand, although citizens are also progressively more informed about how to use e-services, actual use remains limited; more than half of those who are informed reported they had used them rarely or never in the previous 2 years. The vast majority of those who did use them rate them as easy to use, as in the previous monitoring cycle. Finally, more people believe that administrations proactively asked for citizens' proposals to improve service delivery in the past 2 years and that such proposals resulted in actual improvements.

Slightly more than half of Western Balkan citizens confirm that, as users of administrative services, they have opportunities to provide their direct feedback on the quality of services they receive. This share of the population finds such feedback channels somewhat easy to use, but a third have not used them. Additionally, survey results show a shift from mostly negative to mostly positive opinions regarding citizen or CSO involvement in monitoring of service delivery in the past 2 years. Citizens also largely believe that such bottom-up monitoring contributes to the improvement of services. On the other hand, the websites of administrative service providers reveal that administrations seldom report on user feedback; in most administrations, basic information was found for only one out of five sampled services.

Contrary to overall positive public attitudes, deep issues of accessibility of administrative services to vulnerable groups produced pessimistic results in the survey of civil society organisations in the region, as was the case in the 2017/2018 survey. While opinions are slightly more positive regarding the choice of channels for accessing services (such as digital or face-to-face), negative perceptions peak regarding questions on how service provision is adapted to vulnerable groups.

Finally, administrations vary in how well they provide information to service users through their websites. The five sampled services in each administration revealed that they mostly publish basic contact information, documents and information users need to submit, as well as information on fees. In parts of the region, however, users face difficulties in finding how to access services (for example, steps in the process) and simple audio-visual guidance through services.

VII. PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Public financial management (PFM) concerns all key aspects of public finances at the central level. It lays down rules and procedures to be followed in line with general framework for budget users as well as for budgetary control and oversight processes (internal and external). In broad terms, the Principles of Public Administration cover four PFM sub-areas: 1) budgetary policy and budget management, 2) public internal financial control,[180] 3) public procurement, and 4) external audit.

Revenues of national budgets stem largely from taxpayers' money, so the proper management of public finances becomes a principal concern of public administrations and the public alike. Well-functioning public finance management should ensure that public funds are used to the maximum benefit of citizens and society. Moreover, PFM should ensure transparency, and hold governments fiscally accountable for successes or failures of budgetary policy.

VII.1 STATE OF PLAY IN THE REGION AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018[181]

PFM reforms are ongoing in all WB administrations. In 2020, parallel to the implementation of overall reform programmes or strategies, issue-specific policy documents were in place in each administration at the time of monitoring, aimed at further enhancing various sub-areas in PFM that are in the focus of WeBER monitoring.

Table 36. Reform documents implemented in selected PFM sub-areas

	PFM overall	Public Internal Financial Control	Public Procurement	External Audit
ALB	PFM Strategy 2019-2022	n/a	Strategy opened for consultations in June 2020	Supreme State Audit Institution Development Strategy 2018-2022
BIH[182]	PFM Reform Strategy 2014-2020	PIFC System Development Strategy 2020-2025	Public Procurement Development Strategy 2016-2020	Strategic Development Plan of the Audit Office of BIH 2014-2020
KOS	PFM Reform Strategy 2016-2021	Expired in 2019, with a new strategy under preparation	National Public Procurement Strategy 2017-2021	Strategic Plan of the National Audit Office 2018-2021
MKD	PFM Programme 2018-2021	PIFC Policy Paper 2019-2021	n/a	State Audit Office Development Strategy 2018-2022
MNE	PFM Reform Programme 2016-2020	Expired in 2017	Public Procurement System Development Strategy 2016-2020	Strategic Development Plan of the State Audit Institution 2018-2022
SRB	PFM Reform Programme 2016-2020	PIFC Development Strategy 2017-2020	Public Procurement Development Programme 2019-2023	Strategic plan of the State Audit Institution 2019-2023

Note: n/a refers to cases where dedicated policy documents did not exist at the time of monitoring. However, specified PFM sub-areas are fully or partially integrated into overall PFM strategic documents in each administration.

■ Budget management

Administrations in the region show different budget transparency practices, and while steps forward have been taken since the baseline PAR Monitor, the European Commission's reports reveal both recent challenges and areas of improvement. In all administrations, some key budgetary documents are publicly disclosed, but

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180 Also referred to as internal control and audit in SIGMA Principles of Public Administration.

181 The state of play is to a large extent based on the European Commission's reports published in 2020 (which are therefore not cited individually), whilst other sources used are cited separately. Reports of the European Commission are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/package_en (last accessed on 18 January 2021).

182 For BIH, documents for state-level institutions are presented (not entity-level governments).

full transparency is still far from ensured in budget planning or reporting, and the limited reliability of data represents an issue.

In Albania, satisfactory levels of transparency are contrasted with a lack of timeliness in budgetary reporting in terms of expenditure arrears. In BIH, state-level institutions remain the only ones for which budget plans and reports are diligently published, while limited access to consolidated budgetary data remains a hurdle to greater transparency. In Montenegro, ensuring data quality, comprehensiveness, and readability is an issue despite the publishing of major parts of budgetary documentation. Similarly, in Kosovo, information systems still need to ensure that data collected on revenues and expenditure is better integrated. The year 2020 was notable in Montenegro as for the first time in recent history neither the budget for the next fiscal year nor the year-end report for the previous, were deliberated upon or adopted by the parliament by the end of the calendar year. The year-end report was withdrawn from the parliamentary procedure once the new convocation of the Parliament took office. The new Government also decided to enter interim financing for the first time to have more time to prepare a new budget proposal. In Serbia, no major progress in improving transparency was recorded, according to the European Commission's report for 2020. However, at the end of 2019, the National Assembly retroactively passed laws approving the final accounts of the budget for the period from 2002 to 2018, ending a long running practice of noncompliance with the Budget System Law (BSL).

According to the EC's reports, North Macedonia has improved transparency in recent years, with its Ministry of Finance regularly publishing different types of budgetary reports in different formats. It has also launched an open finance portal with up-to-date data on budget executions, and a fiscal transparency portal on COVID-19 related expenditures. A similar portal on fiscal transparency was created in Kosovo. Finally, there is still insufficient public participation in the region regarding the budget planning process, with North Macedonia being once again an outlier, as its 2020 budget preparations were open for input from the public. WeBER monitoring results presented in the "Comparative PAR Monitor findings" section confirm slight improvement regarding budgetary data transparency in the region.

■ Public internal financial control

Central harmonisation units (CHU) in the region continued to report annually on public internal financial control (PIFC) policy implementation and the reporting is occasionally improved. In Serbia, for instance, reports contain relevant recommendations from the State Audit Institution and follow up on those from the previous report. Still, PIFC policy implementation is progressing slowly since the baseline PAR Monitor.

Financial management and control (FMC) procedures, such as risk management, are insufficiently present in administrations or remain at an early stage (Albania, BIH, and Kosovo). Where budget users are increasingly adopting risk registers, practical application in management practices is weak or inconsistent, with capacities needing strengthening (North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia). Similarly, internal audit (IA) functions are insufficiently or ineffectively embedded. In a number of cases, these units are insufficiently staffed or incapable to perform effectively (BIH, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia), and regarding impacts for budget users, are generally focused on compliance than on effectiveness (Albania, BIH, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). Quality assurance and the regular monitoring of IA recommendations remains one of the common tasks for all administrations in the region.

In general, fully operational PIFC within administrations is yet to be set up. As a result, developments mostly occurred at the level of individual budget organisations and apart from CHUs' annual reporting, little information is available to public. Results of the WeBER monitoring presented later in this chapter attest to the lack of even the most basic levels of transparency at times.

■ Public procurement

In the majority of administrations, policy frameworks for improving public procurement systems are either in place or new ones are expected. At the same time, the adopted laws on procurements in defence and security in Albania and new procurement legislation in Serbia still need legislative alignments for full compliance with EU regulations. In parallel to implementing policy documents and perfecting procurement regulations, the main concerns have to do with capacities to properly exercise procurement functions in all administrations.

Contracting authorities managing procurement processes in BIH and Albania are lacking in staff and expertise. In Kosovo, capacities vary significantly between contracting authorities, in Montenegro they have improved but are not conducive to efficiency, and in North Macedonia capacity shortages particularly affect smaller contracting authorities. Central procurement authorities also suffer from inefficiencies due to capacity gaps. Bodies for reviewing remedy procedures, for example, lack in their capacities to cope with the workload of appeals (Albania and BIH), or limited collaboration between two instances of appeal bodies precludes proper enforcement or feedback to procurement officers (Serbia). Although tangible capacity improvements were recorded in the recent period (Montenegro and North Macedonia), additional efforts are needed in each administration. Law enforcement and capacity issues also affect the quality and efficiency of procurement practices, and are tied to their limited transparency.

When it comes to transparency and efficiency, the mandatory usage of e-procurement portals has gained ground in the last two years. Examples include but are not limited to electronic low-value procurements (Albania), e-submission of complaints (Kosovo), e-communication and exchange of data in procurement procedures (Serbia). Moreover, the review body in Kosovo started livestreaming its sessions. In several cases, e-procurement portals were improved functionally (BIH and North Macedonia) or completely revamped in 2019 (Serbia). A brand-new e-procurement system is being released in Montenegro in 2021.

■ External audit

Supreme audit institutions (SAI) have continued to independently exercise their functions, with rising numbers of audit reports, including performance audits, across the region. In most cases, additional capacity improvements are needed to further enhance these institutions' positions and increase the scope and influence of audits. In practice, most SAIs have worked on improving their image, and external communication with stakeholders has become more common since the baseline PAR Monitor.

The impacts of the audits in the public sector are limited, however, and there have been new initiatives to tackle such limitations in the past years. In Albania, for instance, an e-platform for following up on audit recommendations was set up although it still needs to become fully functional, while in Kosovo public debates were organised in municipalities to discuss audit recommendations. In Serbia, the National Assembly adopted a conclusion calling upon the government to ensure that audit recommendations are implemented.

Nonetheless, common traits in the region include low rates of implementation of recommendations by auditees or limited monitoring systems. In this regard, parliamentary supervision over audit reports is not up to expectations. Although some scrutiny takes place, parliaments irregularly follow up on the work of SAIs, with discussions about individual audit reports being the exception rather than the rule. In Serbia, for instance, in 2019 the National Assembly discussed the SAI's annual work report in plenary for the first time. Altogether, SAIs are very slowly managing to increase the impact of their audits on the work of administrations.

VII.2 WEBER MONITORING FOCUS

The monitoring of the PFM area is performed against six SIGMA Principles.

Principle 5: Transparent budget reporting and scrutiny are ensured.

Principle 6: The operational framework for internal control defines responsibilities and powers, and its application by the budget organisations is consistent with the legislation governing public financial management and the public administration in general.

Principle 8: The operational framework for internal audit reflects international standards, and its application by the budget organisations is consistent with the legislation governing public administration and public financial management in general.

Principle 11: There is central institutional and administrative capacity to develop, implement and monitor procurement policy effectively and efficiently.

Principle 13: Public procurement operations comply with basic principles of equal treatment, non-discrimination, proportionality and transparency, while ensuring the most efficient use of public funds and making best use of modern procurement techniques and methods.

Principle 16: The supreme audit institution applies standards in a neutral and objective manner to ensure high-quality audits, which positively impact on the functioning of the public sector.

As these principles are thoroughly assessed by SIGMA, WeBER focuses and enhances elements of the transparency and accessibility of information, external communication, as well as proactive and citizen-friendly approaches to informing citizens.

As an additional development since the baseline monitoring, a new indicator was developed to cover the public procurement sub-area of PFM (SIGMA Principles 11 and 13), which was not monitored in the first cycle, and as a result four indicators were measured in this PAR Monitor edition. With this addition, WeBER researchers monitored public procurement policy for the first time, along with annual budget policy, PIFC, and external audit. As it was measured for the first time, the indicator on public procurement sets baseline values in this report.

The first indicator assesses the transparency and accessibility of budgetary documents, measuring how accessible key budget documents (such as annual state-level budget and budget execution reports) are to citizens, as well as to what extent budgetary information is presented and adapted to the needs of citizens and civil society. To this end, the primary online sources are the data available on the websites of ministries in charge of finance and the data available thereon, as well as official government portals and open data portals.

The second indicator measures the availability and communication of essential information on PIFC to the public and other stakeholders (including consolidated reporting, IA quality reviews, and FMC procedural information). The analysis considers official websites and available documents from government institutions in charge of PIFC policy. The websites of all ministries are analysed for the availability of specific FMC-related information, while official parliamentary documentation serves for the measurement of the regularity of parliamentary scrutiny of PIFC.

In the external audit area, the indicator approach considers SAI's external communication and cooperation practices with the public. This area covers the existence of strategic approaches, means of communication used, citizen-friendliness of audit reporting, the existence of channels for reporting on issues identified by external stakeholders, and consultations with civil society. For this purpose, a combination of expert analysis of SAI documents and analysis of SAI websites was used, complemented with semi-structured interviews with SAI staff to collect additional or missing information.

Finally, in the public procurement area, the indicator measures the availability of public procurement-related information to the public. It focuses on whether central procurement authorities and key contracting authorities

publish annual plans and reports, as well as how informative and citizen friendly central public procurement portals are for the interested public. Additionally, this indicator looks into the availability of open procurement data as well as the percentage of public procurement processes done in open procedures. This indicator is entirely based on review of official documentation on public procurement policy.

VII.3 COMPARATIVE PAR MONITOR FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 5: TRANSPARENT BUDGET REPORTING AND SCRUTINY ARE ENSURED

Regarding this principle, WeBER monitoring focuses on segments of enhanced transparency and accessibility of budget documentation and data in WB administrations. More closely, the indicator measures specific elements of accessibility and transparency of online budget information at the level of central government. The "Transparency and accessibility of budgetary documents" (PFM_P5_I1) indicator consists of seven elements.

Table 37: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PFM_P5_I1 "Transparency and accessibility of budgetary documents"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Enacted annual budget is easily accessible online	4	0	4	4	4	2	4
E2. In-year budget execution reports are easily accessible online	4	4	0	4	4	4	2
E3. Mid-year budget execution reports are easily accessible online	4	0	4	4	0	0	0
E4. Budget execution reports (in-year, mid-year, year-end) contain data on budget spending in terms of functional, organisational, and economic classifications	4	4	4	2	4	0	0
E5. Annual year-end report contains non-financial information about the performance of the Government	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
E6. Official reader-friendly presentation of annual budget (citizen budget) is regularly published online	4	4	2	2	4	0	4
E7. Budgetary data is published in open data formats	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
Total points	**24**	**16**	**15**	**18**	**18**	**6**	**12**
Indicator value 2019/2020[183]	**0-5**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**4**	**1**	**2**
Indicator value 2017/2018		2	2	4	4	1	2

The publication of selected key budgetary documents remained at a satisfactory level in the region for this PAR Monitor. Ministries of finance continued to regularly publish annual state budgets, and for the most part, these are easily accessible on their webpages (meaning with a maximum of three clicks). As in the baseline monitoring, enacted budgets in Albania do not meet the accessibility criteria, and this practice holds for some of the observed budget execution reports as well.

Analysis of the transparency of budget execution reports shows both similarities and divergences among the six administrations. In general, various types of in-year budgetary reports are publicly disclosed online (monthly, quarterly, and mid-year), though with differing levels of regularity and accessibility. Only in BIH, for example,

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183   Conversion of points: 0-4 points = 0; 5-8 points = 1; 9-12 points = 2; 13-16 points = 3; 17-20 points = 4; 21-24 points = 5.

is there no practice of publishing monthly budgetary reports, but quarterly reporting does take place. In the rest of the region, monthly data is usually presented through different examples of fiscal statistics reports or datasets, and in some cases, they contain timeseries that can span from several years to more than a decade (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro). In Serbia, the Ministry of Finance's publishing of monthly public finance bulletins, as identified in the baseline PAR Monitor, has continued. Along with monthly reports, separate quarterly reports are additionally published in some cases, thus enhancing budget transparency (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and as mentioned, BIH). Finally, as previously, mid-year budget reports for two administrations are either completely missing (Montenegro) or produced but not published (Serbia).

Regarding the comprehensiveness of budgetary reporting, the overall situation has slightly improved. Reports in BIH are the most comprehensive, as in all types of budgetary reports observed, WeBER monitoring revealed the publishing of budget spending data for all three mandatory categories (economic, functional, and organisational). Reports for Albania, Kosovo,[184] and North Macedonia are almost as comprehensive, with some exceptions in each case.[185] In Montenegro and Serbia, in-year reporting displays economic expenditure data for the most part. However, in Serbia there was a sudden increase in the transparency of year-end budget reporting, as in December 2019 the National Assembly retroactively passed 17 laws on the final accounts for the budgets from 2002 to 2018. This was followed by the adoption of a law on 2019's budget execution in 2020, suggesting that the publication of year-end reports will now remain regular practice.[186]

Good practices: Enhanced online budget transparency in North Macedonia and Kosovo

The Open Finance Portal in **North Macedonia** is an example of financial transparency in the region (https://open.finance.gov.mk/en/home). It provides public insight into the transaction data of all budget users and is updated daily. This portal is connected to the COVID-19 fiscal transparency website with access to data on: 1) public procurements made by central government institutions to address the COVID-19 pandemic; 2) non-financial donations to all institutions; 3) financial donations to the dedicated accounts of the General Secretariat of the Government and the Ministry of Health, and; 4) all budget payments from the sub-programme for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis (https://finansiskatransparentnost.koronavirus.gov.mk/).

Additionally, citizen budgets are now available in an online, interactive format (http://budget.finance.gov.mk/), and the basic performance of capital investments can be tracked with a separate portal (https://kapitalni-rashodi.finance.gov.mk/?lang=english).

In **Kosovo**, the Fiscal Transparency Portal provides budgetary figures for central institutions and municipal administrations for 2015 to 2020 (https://ptmf.rks-gov.net/page.aspx?id=2,1). Upon the selection of an institution, planned budgets and types of expenditures can be explored, together with spending of public funds on a yearly or quarterly basis.

Despite the presence of more diverse reporting options, non-financial performance information is still rarely found in year-end budget reports. As in previous monitoring cycle, Albania is ahead in this area, having disclosed such information for some policy areas in 2019, in the form of key performance indicators for line ministries.[187] It should be emphasised that publishing year-end reports is a precondition for elementary budgetary transparency and for assessing whether ministries of finance divulge performance information and budgetary outcomes. There are still instances in the region in which they fail to publish them regularly against legal requirements, with an example being the long-overdue adoption of budget reports recently in Serbia. The table below summarises regional practices in terms of data availability, as well as the regularity and accessibility of publishing according to the WeBER methodology.

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184 For Kosovo, only the semi-annual report for 2020 did not provide any budgetary data on government functions, apart from exceptional information on COVID-19-induced budgetary payments.

185 For this element it is examined whether three different types of budget execution reports (in-year, mid-year, and year-end) contain data on expenditures according to the following classifications: a) organisational: regarding budget users (such as ministries, agencies, and social security organisations); b) economic: types of expenditures (such as social protection, salaries, capital investments, transfers to local levels, donations, and subventions), and; c) Functional: purposes/sectors of expenditures (such as education, housing, and health care). The last available reports of each category were considered at the time of monitoring, with three reports in total for each administration.

186 Law on the Final Account of the Budget for 2019, available at https://bit.ly/3p7XiZC, and laws on the final accounts of the previously implemented budgets for 2002 to 2018 at: https://bit.ly/2LNAH6s (last accessed on 22 January 2021).

187 The report outlines policy objectives that have been met for each ministry. For example, the number of farmers who have benefited from various financing schemes designed to stimulate production and employment. This report is available at: http://www.financa.gov.al/paketa-e-projektligjit-te-buxhetit-faktik-2019/ (last accessed on 20 January 2021).

Table 38: Budgetary reporting practices in WB

		IN-YEAR[188]	MID-YEAR[189]	YEAR-END
ALB	Regularity	✓	✓	✓
	Accessibility	✓	x	✓
	Classification (*economic, functional, and organisational*)	2/3	3/3	3/3
BIH	Regularity	x	✓	✓
	Accessibility	✓	✓	✓
	Classification	3/3	3/3	3/3
KOS	Regularity	✓	✓	✓
	Accessibility	✓	✓	✓
	Classification	3/3	2/3	3/3
MKD	Regularity	✓	✓	✓
	Accessibility	✓	x	✓
	Classification	2/3	2/3	3/3
MNE	Regularity	✓	x	✓
	Accessibility	✓	x	✓
	Classification	1/3	x	2/3
SRB	Regularity	x	x	x
	Accessibility	✓	x	✓
	Classification	1/3	x	3/3

Regular publishing of citizen-friendly annual budgets has continued since the baseline PAR Monitor in four administrations (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia), and this practice occurred for the first time for the institutions of BIH. Citizen budgets are available at a single online location since 2016 in Albania, and in Kosovo since 2015. In North Macedonia, they are also presented in an online interactive format for the period from 2018 to 2020 on a specially designed website rather than just as downloadable documents. In Serbia, a citizen guide for the 2020 budget is accessible from the webpage of the Ministry of Finance, however previous versions are still only to be found after searching through the less-accessible archives. The Montenegrin government has not taken steps to start producing citizen budgets yet. Given that these simplified versions of annual budgets can help the public better understand main budgetary priorities and implications, it is of concern that no steps have been made to start producing them in Montenegro since the baseline PAR Monitor.

Practices to avoid: Citizen budgets behind schedule

In **BIH**, 2020's citizen budget is the first such example and the Ministry of Finance and Treasury plans to release them regularly from now on.[190] Despite this positive change, this budget was only published in January 2021. Laws on the budgets of BIH's institutions and international obligations are, as a rule, adopted quite late during the fiscal year (the 2020 budget, for instance, was adopted as late as 29 July), and fiscal gaps that result are capped through temporary financing. Despite these institutional obstacles for early publishing, it is in the public interest to prepare and promote citizen-friendly versions of budgets as soon as annual budgets are formally adopted.

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188 For in-year reporting, the last six months prior to monitoring are taken into consideration (not necessarily within the same fiscal year). By definition, monthly publication means there is also quarterly publication of budget reports. The PAR Monitor methodology considers any in-year reporting as sufficient. That is, if monthly reports are published, it is concluded that quarterly reporting takes place as well.

189 For mid-year reporting, reports for the current and last fiscal year, or for the last two fiscal years, were considered, depending on legal deadlines for publishing mid-year budget reports in each administration.

190 Available at the homepage of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury: https://www.mft.gov.ba/bos/index.php (last accessed on 28 January 2021).

Finally, open data policy has not come a long way since the baseline PAR Monitor. In many cases, datasets with annual budgetary data are in fact available in some open formats, despite not being stored on official open data portals and with no clear indications of fully standardised open data. The only exception is North Macedonia, with its 2020 and 2019 budgets available in XML format and available from the governmental open data portal. In other cases, one can freely download excel files with various, mostly tabular, budgetary data covering at least a single fiscal year to differing degrees of detail (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia), which was still sufficient for scoring a point based on indicator methodology. BIH remains the only example without any published open data.

Overall, developments in budgetary reporting and data transparency in the previous two years produced higher indicator values in cases of Albania and BIH, that are getting closer to the higher echelon, with North Macedonia and Kosovo retaking the highest positions. Montenegro and Serbia are still at the lower end of the regional scale.

Graph 22: Indicator values for PFM_P5_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles
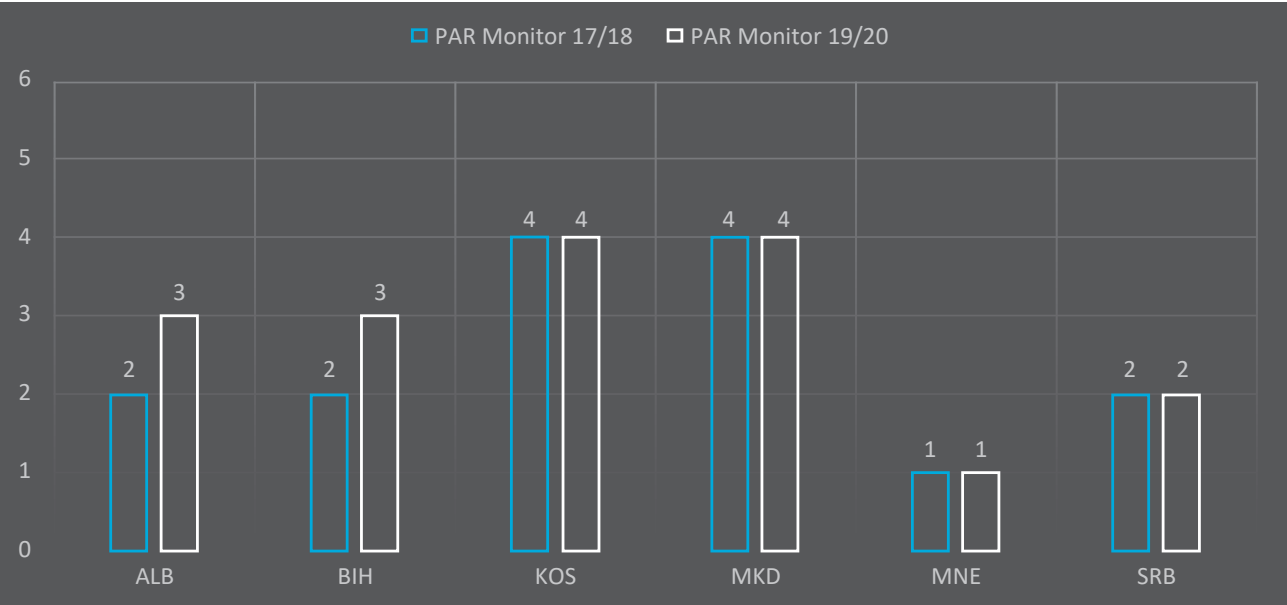
PRINCIPLE 6: THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNAL CONTROL DEFINES RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS, AND ITS APPLICATION BY THE BUDGET ORGANISATIONS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE LEGISLATION GOVERNING PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN GENERAL

PRINCIPLE 8: THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNAL AUDIT REFLECTS INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS, AND ITS APPLICATION BY THE BUDGET ORGANISATIONS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE LEGISLATION GOVERNING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN GENERAL

The WeBER monitoring approach to these two principles is based on the transparency of the public internal financial control system, including financial management and control (FMC), internal audits (IA), and central harmonisation units (CHUs). The corresponding indicator "Public availability of information on public internal financial controls and the parliamentary scrutiny" (6PFM_P6&8_I1) indicator is composed of five elements.

Table 39: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PFM_P6&P8_I1 "Public availability of information on public internal financial controls and the parliamentary scrutiny"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Consolidated annual report on PIFC is regularly produced and published online	4	4	4	0	4	4	2
E2. Quality reviews of internal audit reports are regularly produced and published online	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
E3. Ministries publish information related to financial management and control	2	1	0	0	2	0	0
E4. CHUs proactively engage with the public	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E5. Parliament regularly deliberates on/reviews the consolidated report on PIFC	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Total points	**12**	**5**	**6**	**0**	**6**	**4**	**3**
Indicator value 2019/2020[191]	**0-5**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Indicator value 2017/2018		3	2	0	2	1	1

Findings speak of little change since the baseline PAR Monitor regarding the level of basic PIFC transparency in the WB. Ministries of finance regularly prepare and publish consolidated annual reports on PIFC implementation in all administration except Kosovo (for which 2018 and 2019 reports were prepared but remain publicly unavailable). Practices of making reports publicly available still differ in terms of consistency and predictability, such as who is responsible for publishing and at what point in the year. These issues sometimes result from the absence of formally-prescribed deadlines for the preparation or public release of these reports.

As noted in the baseline PAR Monitor, administration with examples of consistent PIFC consolidated reporting are Albania and BIH, where these reports are regularly published at a single online location. The Ministry of Finance and Treasury in BIH has consistently published them every March, despite there being no explicit deadline. In Serbia, reports are listed at the single location of the Ministry of Finance's website, but not on the CHU's portal anymore, and there is still a long gap between the publishing of the last two consecutive reports. In Montenegro, these reports are released through the government's official portal, but within the records of governmental sessions. Importantly, they are not published by the Ministry of Finance at all, although the CHU's website is an integral part of the Ministry's website. Such examples significantly limit the accessibility

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191 Conversion of points: 0-2 points = 0; 3-4 points = 1; 5-6 points = 2; 7-8 points = 3; 9-10 points = 4; 11-12 points = 5.

of such reports, and the effort required to search for them is considerable. Finally, unlike in the previous cycle, the Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia has published online both annual consolidated reports for the last two calendar years observed at the time of monitoring (2018 and 2019).

There is no demonstrated progress in improving PIFC transparency in terms of the production and proactive publication of internal audit quality reviews. That said, while internal audit quality assurance remains an issue across the region, as indicated in the European Commission's reports, evidence of such practice was found only in Serbia. The newly-adopted rulebook on internal audit quality reviews in Montenegro from January 2020 splits the task of quality review between the CHU and internal audit units, but it does not explicitly foresee their publishing.[192] Finally, 24 internal audit units in Montenegro have adopted programmes to enhance quality of internal audit, but none are publicly available.

Good practices: Regular publishing of internal audit quality reviews

The **Serbian** CHU began publishing quality review reports of internal audit in 2016, and remains the only example of such practice in the region. These quality reviews can be accessed at the same online location as annual PIFC reports. The last one, published in March 2020, follows a similar format to the one analysed in the baseline PAR Monitor, consisting of a sample of ten budget users and analysing the performance of their internal audit units based on a predefined set of internal audit standards.[192] While a positive practice, the structure and style of these reports remains unchanged: too formal, with no sign of an effort to promote them or to make them more reader friendly.

When it comes to FMC, proactiveness in publishing even basic information is still rare. Analysis of the websites of all the ministries in the region reveals, again, only the occasional presence of any of the three pieces of information covered by the PAR Monitor in this area: risk registers, procedure registries/books of procedures, and information on appointed FMC managers. The table below summarises these findings and suggests a noteworthy difference for North Macedonia only, where ministries were more transparent but only for information on FMC managers (mostly published in rulebooks on the internal organisation of ministries).

Table 40: Publishing of basic FMC information by ministries in the region

# of ministries		# of ministries publicly revealing FMC information				
		Risk register(s)	Book of procedures	Appointed FMC Managers	% of all ministries publishing at least single piece of information	Percentage point difference as compared to PAR Monitor 17/18
ALB	11	0	0	6	55%	+12
BIH	9	0	0	0	0%	-
KOS	16	1	1	2	13%	+4
MKD	16	1	0	14	88%	+55
MNE	17	4	2	0	29%	+18
SRB[195]	21	2	1	4	29%	+7

Note: in certain cases, the percentage point difference was affected not only by the availability of observed FMC information but also by the different number of ministries covered as compared to the baseline PAR Monitor.

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192 Rulebook available at: https://mif.gov.me/biblioteka/pravilnici (last accessed on 21 January 2021).

193 An internal audit quality review published in March 2020 covers January 2018 to September 2019, available at: *https://www.mfin.gov.rs/o-ministarstvu/dokumenti/* (last accessed on 21 January 2021).

194 In Serbia, following the parliamentary elections in 2020 and the formation of the new government, three new ministries were formed for which no websites were available for data analysis at the time of monitoring.

In 2020, CHUs in the region did not actively communicate PIFC developments. The only tools occasionally used for proactive communication were standard press releases and media appearances by CHU representatives. Even this media presence regarding PIFC was quite rare on an annual basis.[195] Along these lines, CHUs still do not produce any kind of promotional materials or reader-friendly report summaries as external communication tools. CHUs also have not yet begun to organise public events with the participation of non-state stakeholders. Some ministries of finance are increasingly present on social media, but space dedicated to PIFC is limited. It should be noted that the Serbian CHU has run its own website for years now, but it is infrequently updated and is missing relevant information (with annual PIFC reports, for instance, no longer accessible).[196] The rarity of CHUs' proactive engagement confirms that public outreach is not a priority in the region. Given the importance of PIFC in EU accession processes and in securing the sound management of national funds in the region, greater public scrutiny and access to information remain essential from the perspective of civil society. Based on the presented findings, the predominant approach in the region seems to be unchanged, treating PIFC as an internal affair. At the same time, existing practices suggest that formality in PIFC implementation still takes precedence over substance, thus making the public availability of PIFC information a non-issue for governments.

Finally, parliamentary scrutiny of annual PIFC reports was less practiced in this monitoring period compared to the previous monitoring cycle, whether legally required or not. Findings show that only the Parliamentary Assembly of BIH regularly reviewed them in 2019 and 2020.[197]

> **Practices to avoid: Discontinuing parliamentary discussions on PIFC reports**
>
> Discussions on annual PIFC reports in parliaments, even if voluntary and proactive, are considered a good practice as they can result in greater PIFC transparency and government accountability. However, parliamentary discussions on PIFC consolidated reports in **Albania** and **Kosovo** as previously reported have not become a regular phenomenon. In the baseline PAR Monitor, plenary deliberations on these reports took place for two consecutive monitoring years (for 2015 and 2016), and in the case of Kosovo, in parliamentary committees as well. Afterwards, no such practice was identified.

All things considered, the value for this indicator has shifted only for Albania (declining from 3 to 2), without altering the generally modest regional outcome. In Albania, the fact that the Parliament did not have a chance to discuss any annual PIFC reports in the period since the last PAR Monitor led to this lower indicator value.

Graph 23: Indicator values for PMF_P6&8_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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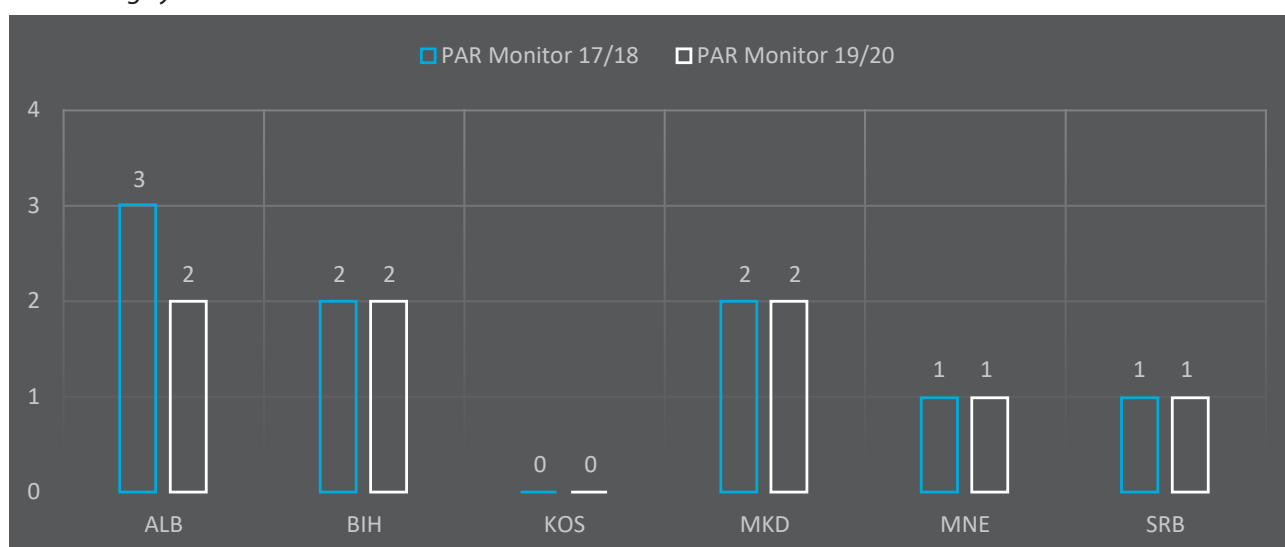
195   For proactive CHU engagement, the reference year was 2020, since indicator measurement was performed in the second half of that year.

196   Central Harmonisation Unit of the Ministry of Finance, available at: http://ifkj.mfin.gov.rs/Pocetna.aspx (last accessed on 21 January 2021).

197   The Parliamentary Assembly reviewed both consolidated reports (for FMC and IA) in 2019, available at: https://bit.ly/3o0QED3, https://bit.ly/2LLV04a, and in 2020, available at: https://bit.ly/3sLBCVC, https://bit.ly/2M9eZJV (last accessed on 21 January 2021).

PRINCIPLE 11: THERE IS CENTRAL INSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP, IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR PROCUREMENT POLICY EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

PRINCIPLE 13: PUBLIC PROCUREMENT OPERATIONS COMPLY WITH BASIC PRINCIPLES OF EQUAL TREATMENT, NON-DISCRIMINATION, PROPORTIONALITY AND TRANSPARENCY, WHILE ENSURING THE MOST EFFICIENT USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS AND MAKING BEST USE OF MODERN PROCUREMENT TECHNIQUES AND METHODS

WeBER approach to these principles puts emphasis on the public availability and online accessibility of specific public procurement policy information and documents. It focuses on practices of central procurement authorities, ministries (as one of the key contracting authorities), and national public procurement portals. The transparency of procurement policy is essential for governmental financial accountability, as well as for effective policy outcomes from public procurements. The newly developed "**Availability of public procurement related information to the public**" (PFM_P11&13_I1) indicator was measured for the first time in this PAR Monitor and consists of eight elements.

Table 41: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PFM_P11&13_I1 "Availability of public procurement related information to the public"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. Central procurement authority regularly reports to the public on the implementation of overall public procurement policy	4	4	0	4	4	4	4
E2. Central review body regularly reports to the public on procedures for the protection of rights of bidders in public procurement	4	4	0	4	2	4	2
E3. Reporting on public procurement by the central procurement is citizen-friendly and accessible	2	2	1	2	2	2	1
E4. Public procurement portal is user-friendly	2	2	0	1	2	1	2
E5. Central-level contracting authorities regularly publish annual procurement plans	4	0	0	4	4	4	0
E6. Central-level contracting authorities regularly publish annual procurement reports	4	0	0	0	0	4	0
E7. Central procurement authority publishes open procurement data	2	0	0	1	0	0	2
E8. Open and competitive procedures are the main method of public procurement	4	4	0	2	4	0	2
Total points	**26**	**16**	**1**	**18**	**18**	**19**	**13**
Indicator value 2019/2020[198]	**0-5**	**3**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**2**

Public procurement policy is centrally coordinated in all WB administrations, and responsible bodies report on implemented procurement processes annually. Reports provide insight into a variety of statistical and qualitative data on procurement policy implementation, and in some cases in-year reports are prepared (starting from 2013, these reports have been published every 6 months in Serbia for example), or reporting is split between different stages of the procurement cycle (separate annual reports are prepared in BIH for awarded contracts and for monitoring the implementation of procedures). Central review bodies for remedy procedures and the protection of rights prepare and publish yearly work reports that cover the handling of complaints from economic operators, with statistical presentations of information and references to the relevant cases.

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198 Conversion of points: 0-5 points = 0; 6-9 points = 1; 10-13 points = 2; 14-17 points = 3; 18-21 points = 4; 22-26 points = 5.

As for the availability of reports for public scrutiny, either through the website of central bodies or national procurement portals, WeBER observes whether reports covering the last three full calendar years were published online at the time of monitoring in December 2020. The table below displays three cases of fully regular publishing in the region: for Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro, with the reporting in BIH almost entirely absent from the public eye.

Table 42: Public procurement reporting regularity by central authorities (December 2020)

	Central procurement authority			Central review body		
	2017	**2018**	**2019**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
ALB	Public Procurement Agency			Public Procurement Commission		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BIH[199]	Public Procurement Agency BIH			Procurement Review Body		
	✓	x	x	x	x	x
KOS	Central Procurement Agency			Procurement Review Body		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MKD	Public Procurement Bureau			State Commission for Appeals		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
MNE	Public Procurement Administration[200]			Commission for the Control of PP Procedures		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SRB	Public Procurement Office			Republic Commission for Protection of Rights		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x

Review of annual reports from central procurement authorities (visible in the left column in the above table) demonstrates that they are, for the most part, citizen-friendly and accessible. They usually contain reader-friendly summaries on the main outcomes in procurements in the reporting period (except in BIH and Serbia, where the reports do not contain summaries). In some cases, summaries detail key trends over the years (Montenegro) or market analysis (North Macedonia). Most procurement outcomes are also visually and simply presented, in a manner that speaks to a broader audience. Finally, in all cases, reports are published on a clearly designated website location accessible within three clicks.[201]

Good practices: Public procurement ID page in Montenegro

In **Montenegro**, the annual reports of the Directorate for Public Procurement Policy contain two-page executive summaries, written in a reader-friendly manner. These contain key facts from reports and detail key trends/changes in comparison to the past year. Additionally, annual reports contain a one-page "Annual Personal ID of Public Procurement" which lists all the key numerical information about public procurements (such as the number of contracts, total spending, average number of bids, and others) in the past year.[201] Although not too eye-catching or advanced graphically, this page gives readers a sufficiently clear overview of key facts and trends in the past year along with a concise summary of approximately 60-page report. Additionally, all annual procurement reports from individual contracting authorities are available on the website of the central procurement authority.

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199 For state-level BIH, no reports on awarded contracts were available for 2018 and 2019 at the time of monitoring.

200 Since the reorganisation of the state administration in 2018, the Public Procurement Administration has ceased to exist, and its functions have been taken over by the Directorate General for Public Procurement in the Ministry of Finance

201 The public procurement ID for 2019 is available at: https://bit.ly/3b5Ovlj, p. 3 (last accessed on 15 February 2021).

Public procurement portals, searchable online databases with tender information, can additionally enhance the transparency of the entire procurement cycle if they allow for easy public insight. Namely, all central procurement authorities in the WB run such portals, and users are offered different functions and content. Generally, one does not have to be a registered user to search through data and there are no examples of subscription fees or other monetary barriers to access tender documentation. It should be noted, however, that in many cases full access to tender documentation is available only for registered users (BIH, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia). To assist users, including economic operators or any other interested parties, portals mostly offer textual or visual guidance on how to navigate them, as well as sections on frequently asked questions. Glossaries with explanations of public procurement terms are rarely found on any portals, but central procurement authorities occasionally publish them on their own webpages. Lastly, portals' search functions are extensively supported, and most of them enable at least searching per text, notice type, contracting body, and time period.[202] The table below summarises the criteria for the user-friendliness of procurement portals as assessed in this PAR Monitor.

Table 43: Public procurement portal user-friendly functionalities and contents

	Registration-free access	Charge free	Glossary	How-to guide	FAQ	Search	Open data export
ALB	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
BIH	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	-
KOS	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	xlsx
MKD	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
MNE[203]	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	-
SRB[204]	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	xlsx, xml, json

Practices to avoid: New portals starting from scratch with new data

In **Montenegro**, three different portals for public procurement have been created (in 2012, 2015, and 2021) in the period of nine years. In **Serbia**, the situation was similar, with three different portals created in the span of 12 years (in 2008, 2013, and 2020). Though each one was an improvement over the last in terms of functionality, they however did not transfer the information from previous portals. Each new version was essentially a clean slate that began to be populated with data from the day of its publishing. Subsequent portals usually contain links to previous ones, noting that information from before a certain point can be found in the older version. This practice limits the usefulness of each portal, hampers attempts at long term analysis, and forces users to shift between portals in search of information. While the improvement of functionalities and the use of new IT tools to enable better user experiences is desirable, efforts must be made to include past data into new portals.

When analysed at the level of individual contracting authorities, however, the transparency of public procurement documents is tangibly lower than for central authorities. Ministries in the region publish annual procurement plans more often than yearly reports on their implementation, either on their webpages or public procurement portals. For the two consecutive years, as presented below, ministries in Montenegro were the most regular in publishing annual procurement documents, with Serbia as the runner-up. Still, aside from Montenegro, there are no other single cases of full transparency in a given year observed in the rest of the

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202 Certain portals have more extensive search options than required by the PAR Monitor methodology.

203 Assessment was based on the old portal, active at the time of monitoring. A new public procurement portal was launched in 2021: http://cejn.gov.me/landingPage (last accessed on 12 February 2021).

204 Assessment was based on the new public procurement portal that covers procedures initiated after July 2020: https://jnportal.ujn.gov.rs/konzola. The old portal is available at: http://portal.ujn.gov.rs/Default.aspx (last accessed on 28 January 2021).

region. Table 44 showcases the number and share of all ministries that made annual procurement documents publicly available at the time of WeBER monitoring.

Table 44: Publishing of annual procurement documents by ministries

		Procurement plans		Procurement reports	
		2019	**2020**	**2018**	**2019**
ALB	#	0	0	0	0
	%	-	-	-	-
BIH	#	6	6	1	1
	%	67%	67%	11%	11%
KOS[205]	#	16	16	0	0
	%	100%	100%	-	-
MKD	#	16	16	0	0
	%	100%	100%	-	-
MNE	#	17	17	17	17
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%
SRB	#	16	17	19	19
	%	80%	85%	95%	95%

As in the cases of other PAR areas, the availability of open data is generally quite low in the region. There are different cases of institutions publishing data on their public procurements in open formats, but central procurement authorities do not yet publish open data as a rule. Two exceptional cases are public procurement portals in Kosovo and Serbia, which allow users to export all available data in selected open formats. Despite the limited access to tender documentation for the non-registered visitors in Serbia, the portal allows such exports across all the categories available to them.

Finally, based on annual reports by central procurement authorities, open procedures with publishing of a call represent the main method for implementing procurements in the region in 2019.[206] The share of open procedures in total procurements was above 90% in three cases (Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and in the case of Kosovo, slightly below (88%). For BIH, no information was available as the central procurement authority did not publish report for the last calendar year at the time of monitoring, and the most concerning situation in this regard was in Montenegro, where 16.5% of procedures were done using non-competitive methods.[207]

Overall, the baseline values of the indicator on public procurement indicate the moderate availability of basic procurement information to the public, with three administrations at the upper end with the indicator value of 4 (Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro), and the other three below. For BIH, a value of 0 is recorded mostly due to irregular reporting to the public by central procurement authorities and ministries, as well to the least citizen friendly e-procurement portal in the region.

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205 The number of ministries changed during monitoring in 2020, from 15 to 16.

206 For maximum points, WeBER methodology stipulates that percentage of procedures other than open and competitive is up to 5%.

207 Annual report of the Directorate for Public Procurement Policy, 2019, p. 24, available at: https://bit.ly/3jGMKPn (last accessed on 12 February 2021).

Graph 24: Indicator values for PMF_P11&13_I1 – the 2019/2020 monitoring cycle
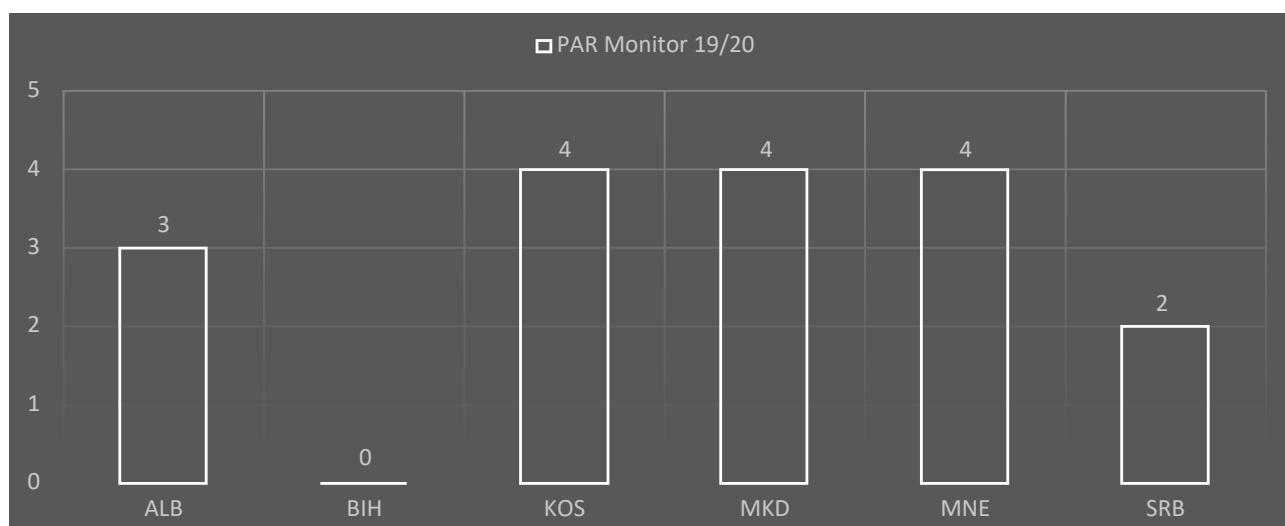
PRINCIPLE 16: THE SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTION APPLIES STANDARDS IN A NEUTRAL AND OBJECTIVE MANNER TO ENSURE HIGH-QUALITY AUDITS, WHICH POSITIVELY IMPACT ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

WeBER approaches this principle from the perspective of SAIs' external communication to all interested stakeholders outside of the parliament, as such practices can help improve the culture of accountability in society. The "Supreme audit institution's communication and cooperation with the public pertaining to its work" (PFM_P16_I1) indicator consists of six elements.

Table 45: Element scores and corresponding indicator values for PFM_P16_I1 "Supreme audit institution's communication and cooperation with the public pertaining to its work"

Indicator element	Max	ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
E1. SAI develops a communication strategy for reaching out to the public	4	2	0	4	4	4	2
E2. SAI has dedicated at least one job position for proactive communication and provision of feedback to the public	4	4	4	2	2	2	4
E3. SAI utilises various means of communication with the public	2	2	2	1	1	0	2
E4. SAI produces citizen-friendly summaries of audit reports	4	0	4	0	0	4	4
E5. Official channels for submitting complaints or initiatives to SAI by external stakeholders are developed (wider public, CSOs)	2	2	2	0	2	0	0
E6. SAI consults CSOs and their work for the purpose of identifying risks in the public sector	2	0	2	2	1	0	0
Total points	**18**	**10**	**14**	**9**	**10**	**10**	**12**
Indicator value 2019/2020[208]	**0-5**	**3**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**4**
Indicator value 2017/2018		4	1	3	0	1	2

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208 Conversion of points: 0-3 points = 0; 4-5 points = 1; 6-7 points = 2; 8-11 points = 3; 12-15 points = 4; 16-18 points = 5.

Across the region SAIs have strengthened their approaches towards external communication since the baseline PAR Monitor. All institutions continued to implement strategic development plans, as indicated in this report's state of play, which recognise the need for increased external communication. In the meantime, more SAIs have adopted purposefully-designed communication strategies for reaching out to public and other stakeholders and for enhancing the visibility of their work (Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro).

The Kosovo National Audit Office's (KNAO) communication strategy emphasises the need to maintain strong relations with the legislature, media, and civil society to ensure that their messages reach citizens.[209] The KNAO defines stakeholders, their expected levels of engagement, as well as five principles of communication (fact-based, clear, timely, engaged, and inclusive). In a similar fashion, the stand-alone communication strategy of the State Audit Office in North Macedonia (SAO) addresses the identification of proper channels and messages as the main communication issue. In that sense, the SAO lays out tailored communication strategies for all target groups.[210] The communication strategy of the Montenegrin State Audit institution (SAI), aims at enhancing perceptions of the value of the SAI's work by relying on the communication principles of transparency, availability of information, innovation, and proactiveness. The SAI intends to reach out to society, through organisational rebranding, website development, the publishing of audit calendars, communication plans for each individual audit report, the development of social media policy, annual meetings with civil society, and other measures.[211] All three SAIs have prepared implementation plans and monitoring mechanisms for their communication strategies, an indication of their commitments to fully achieve the intended communication goals.

In Albania, BIH, and Serbia, where no communication strategies currently exist, ongoing strategic plans are explicit on communication intentions with the public. The Albanian Supreme State Audit Institution (ALSAI) was the only institution with a communication strategy (which expired in 2019) in the baseline PAR Monitor, and now, the ALSAI prioritises communication in its development plan. The communication strategies of the AOI BIH and the SAI of Serbia were under preparation at the time of monitoring.[212]

In a positive development since the baseline PAR Monitor, all monitored SAIs have at least a single job position that includes proactive communication with the public. These positions are part of internal units with broader focuses, yet they entail at least one of the following tasks: 1) the preparation of information, documents, and other materials for proactive communication with the public, 2) answering citizens' questions and queries related to SAIs' scopes of work, and 3) handling citizens' inputs regarding the utilisation of public funds. Since the baseline PAR Monitor, North Macedonia's SAO has started practicing proactive communication tasks. The table below provides an overview of these job positions and what units they belong to.

209 KNAO Communication Strategy 2020-2022, available at: https://bit.ly/39rL0pA (last accessed on 22 January 2021).
210 SAO Communication Strategy 2020-2023, available at: https://bit.ly/3bYeugx (last accessed on 22 January 2021).
211 SAI Communication Strategy 2020-2024, available at: https://bit.ly/3978b8v (last accessed on 22 January 2021).
212 Interviews with the AOI and the SAI representatives, held on 16 December 2020.

Table 46: SAI job positions for proactive communication and provision of feedback to the public

	Registration-free access	Charge free
ALB	Specialist for Communication and Letters from the Public[213]	Directorate of Communication, Publishing and External Relation
BIH	Head of Department for International Cooperation and Public Relations	International Cooperation and Public Relations Unit
KOS	Officer for Public Communication	Department for Public Communication, Professional Development, and FOI requests
MKD	Officer for Cooperation with the Media, Responding to Requests on Free Access to Information, and Communication with the Public[214]	Sector for Legal and General Affairs, Public Procurement and Public Relations
MNE	Adviser for Relations with the Public, the Parliament, the Government, and the Non-Governmental Sector	Department for International Cooperation and Standards, Strategic Development, and Relations with the Parliament, the Government, and the Public
SRB	Head of Service, and Officer for Public Relations[215]	Service for International Cooperation and Public Relations

When it comes to means of external communication, SAIs have communicated more frequently with the public within the year preceding the monitoring. Traditional press conferences were held frequently, and social media channels are now regularly used by three institutions – the ALSAI (LinkedIn), the AOI BIH (Twitter), and the KNAO (Facebook). Promotional materials are produced and disseminated by half of region's SAIs as well:

- The ALSAI regularly published a periodical newsletter on its results, called Audit Bulletins;[216]
- The AOI BIH's communication practices have grown considerably since the baseline PAR Monitor and various brochures and infographics are being published;[217]
- The SAI of Montenegro published a special summary of the 2019 year-end budget audit with a visual design that set it apart from other audit products.[218]

Still, SAIs in the region are not taking advantage of interactive data visualisation for presenting their audit work. The best attempts were the press presentations of Serbia's SAI, which contain plenty of basic visualisations, and the AOI BIH's infographics.[219] Finally, while events to promote a culture of government accountability are a rare in the region, the ALSAI maintained its good practice of annual Open Month for Citizens series of events in 2018 and 2019, planned jointly with civil society.[220] Additionally, Serbia's SAI held a one-off event in December 2019 to mark the 175th anniversary of establishing external oversight function over public finances in Serbia.

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213 This position was vacant at the time of monitoring. The reception and processing of letters, requests, and complaints is also regulated in the internal regulation.

214 This position was vacant at the time of monitoring.

215 Two positions, one filled at the time of monitoring.

216 ALSAI Audit Bulletins, available at: https://bit.ly/3iIF5PS (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

217 AOI BIH brochures, available at: https://bit.ly/3qVOtmp, and infographics at: https://bit.ly/2KKlSRI (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

218 Available at: https://bit.ly/2YbHgSJ (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

219 Press presentation job of the SAI of Serbia available at: https://bit.ly/3qNizby (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

220 The Open Month for Citizens allows citizens, civil society, academia, and professionals to get acquainted with this institution, obtain information on its audit work, and participate in conferences and other events. Programmes available at ALSAI's website: https://bit.ly/3ofEMgN (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

When it comes to audit reports, SAIs in the region are investing efforts to align with international standards that recommend making them more understandable to the public,[221] and citizen-friendly summaries, with concise presentations of main results, are increasing in number. Namely, the KNAO emerged as a positive outlier in the baseline PAR Monitor, yet this time there was no example of citizen friendly audit summary (with a total of only five audit reports published, compared to 115 in the baseline PAR Monitor). In the meantime, the SAI of Montenegro has invested efforts towards increasing the citizen-friendliness of financial audit reports, which are presented in the form of online articles. Although still with traces of formal and technical jargon, these posts concisely sum up audit intentions and main findings, resulting in short and easily-readable texts for the most part. In the rest of the region, the SAO in North Macedonia prepared abstracts without making them publicly available, and the ALSAI has made no such summaries to date.

Table 47. Citizen-friendliness of published audit reports[222]

	ALB	**BIH**	**KOS**	**MKD**	**MNE**	**SRB**
# of reports	67	81	5	10	35	184
# of citizen-friendly	0	81	0	0	24	184
%	**0%**	**100%**	**0%**	**0%**	**71%**	**100%**
PAR Monitor 17/18 %	0%	6%	71%	0%	14%	1%

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221 International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions - ISSAI 20, Principle 8, point 5, available at: https://bit.ly/3cdQFBp (last accessed on 25 January 2021).

222 All audit reports published in the twelve months preceding the measurement were analysed, and only finalised audits were considered. In most cases, the period between January and December 2020 was observed, apart from in Serbia and BIH (December 2019 to December 2020) due to slightly earlier start dates of measurement.

Good practices: Citizen-friendly summaries for all audit reports

In **Serbia**, the SAI has recently started publishing one-page summaries of all audit reports on a designated sub-section of its webpage (https://bit.ly/3t8KEvQ). These summaries are standardised, stating audit topics, periods covered, SAI opinions, and main findings in a concise manner. If auditors' opinions are less positive, summaries present more information on areas for improvement. Different types of audits are characterised by different formats of summaries. For example, summaries for compliance audits on average feature somewhat more text on key findings and conclusions, whereas summaries for performance audits maintain a distinct visual structure. Summaries of performance audits contain also short introductions which are particularly citizen friendly language-wise, including audit results, graphics, and basic statistics. Overall, these summaries are one-page storytelling documents, recapping problems and what can be done.[223]

In **BIH**, the AOI is now producing summaries of all audits, presented in yearly, stand-alone publications published for audit work in 2020 and 2019 (https://bit.ly/36tuuDA). Apart from being easily accessible, these publications present individual audit summaries in what is for the most part a clear and citizen-friendly fashion. Summaries are presented for financial and performance audits in separate chapters with main findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each. Still, it should be highlighted that performance audit summaries are slightly better designed, with less texts and more visual presentations.

Practices to avoid: Citizen-friendly abstracts, sitting on a shelf

As a recent change since May 2020, the SAO in **North Macedonia** has started to produce abstracts for all completed audit reports. These abstracts have concise explanations of the main findings and conclusions in each case. The SAO is also disseminating these abstracts to stakeholders directly. In the SAO Annual Report 2019 it is stated that "with audit report abstracts containing the most important information, it is easier to read and understand the contexts and contents of audit reports. Upon the publication of a new final audit report, the media, news agencies, individual investigative journalists, and civil society organisations are immediately informed, with a link to the published report on the SAO website, and an abstract of the report."[224]

Nevertheless, despite the proactiveness of the SAO in reaching out to the media and civil society, the highly positive development of producing abstracts is diminished because they are not published on the SAO website together with audit reports.

SAIs' communication with the public proceeds also through the reception and handling of various citizen complaints and initiatives, mirroring the picture from the baseline PAR Monitor. Namely, in Albania and North Macedonia, and to an extent in BIH, there are tailored systems for collecting complaints and tips. In the rest of the region this process develops in a less systemic way. The ALSAI makes a dedicated public channel for submitting complaints, calling on citizens to report cases of abuse, guaranteeing anonymity and the follow-up of such cases until resolution.[225] The North Macedonian SAO hosts an easily accessible section where stakeholders can submit proposals for audit topics. At the end of 2020, the AOI BIH created an online complaint form requesting citizen feedback, enquiries, and suggestions, which has yet to demonstrate its results.[226] In the rest of the region, SAIs generally welcome questions and suggestions from the public, but there are no official, purposefully-created channels for such interaction (Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia).[227]

When it comes to relations with civil society, the majority of SAIs continue to express their readiness to cooperate with CSOs, but in half of the region this cooperation is focused more on contributions to potential audit topics (BIH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia). AOI BIH activity reports for 2018 and 2019 points out annual, end-of-year

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223 Audit summaries available at the webpage of the SAI: https://bit.ly/2Yf1Ql7 (last accessed on 26 January 2021).
224 SAO Annual report, 2019, available at: https://bit.ly/3q8elG8 (last accessed on 10 January 2021).
225 Available at: https://bit.ly/36gmdTp (last accessed on 26 January 2021).
226 Available at: http://revizija.gov.ba/Form/Contact?lang=en.
227 Serbia's SAI Annual Reports, available at: https://bit.ly/39kZWps (last accessed on 26 January 2021).

consultations with CSOs for identifying socially important issues potentially subject to performance audits.[228] KNAO remains the regional champion as it continually holds civil society forums to discuss priority topics for its performance audit plans. North Macedonia's SAO has also accelerated cooperation with civil society, and it also uses CSOs analyses, which have indicated potential illegal actions by state bodies, for its audit planning.[229] It also is noteworthy that in December 2020, Montenegro's SAI consulted with civil society for the first time, as part of preparations for its 2021 annual audit plan, though only based on the initiative of CSOs. In the rest of the region, this cooperation was either more general (Serbia), or no new developments have been recorded since the baseline PAR Monitor (Albania)[230].[231]

Good practice: Consultative forum with civil society institutions

In September 2020, **Kosovo's** KNAO formalised its practice of consulting civil society on audit plans and issues. KNAO Regulation no. 02/2020 formally establishes a consultative forum with civil society, adding that "the Auditor General holds meetings with civil society organisations to be consulted on audit issues."[231] In addition, the same regulation stipulates that the Communication and Professional Development Department provides administrative support to this consultative forum and prepares meetings and forums with civil society to obtain external input on auditing. Based on the KNAO's responses, this consultative forum was used in the drafting of the currently-implemented strategic plan and communication strategy.

Throughout the region, SAIs have demonstrated considerable initiative and proactiveness since the baseline PAR Monitor. Communication strategies are increasing in numbers, the advantages of different communication channels and products are being recognised, and efforts to make audit results more comprehensible to non-experts are tangible. Together with more inclusive approaches to civil society, these developments have positively influenced the indicator values in four administrations.

Graph 25: Indicator values for PMF_P16_I1 - comparison of values for the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 monitoring cycles

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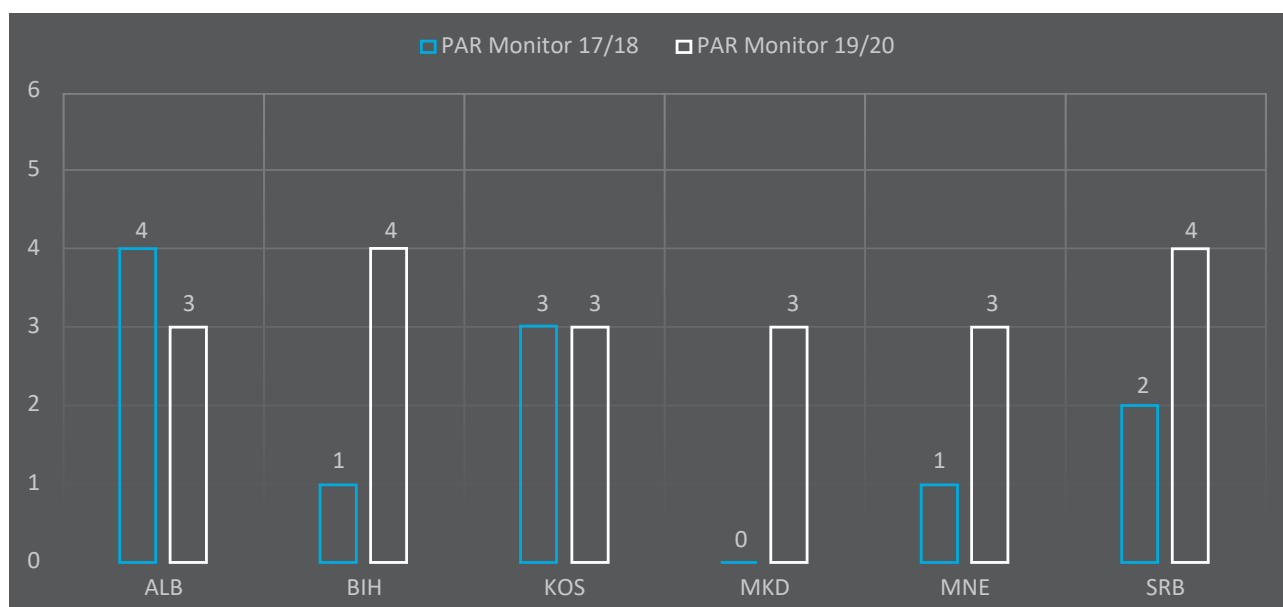
228   AOI BIH Annual reports, available at: https://bit.ly/39hrCvu (last accessed on 26 January 2021).

229   Interviews with the SAO management, held in December 2020, and the SAO annual reports. Evidence was found for one observed year – 2019.

230   Albania's ALSAI has signed memoranda/cooperation agreements with selected CSO, available at the ALSAI website: https://bit.ly/3oFqVAq (last accessed on 1 February 2021). However, no consultations with civil society took place in the measurement period.

231   Regulation 02/20 on the Internal Organisation and Systematisation of Job Positions, available at: https://bit.ly/3a7HAYa (last accessed on 26 January 2021).

VII.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS IN THE PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AREA

In this area, WeBER monitors the availability of budgetary data along with the external communication practices. Official websites are reviewed to assess: 1) the transparency and accessibility of annual budget data, 2) how governments communicate with citizens about PIFC, 3) the availability of public procurement information, and 4) the degree to which information is publicly available about the work of SAIs.

Approaches to budgetary transparency are diverse in the region, but there are efforts to increase the amount of publicly available information. Ministries of finance regularly publish state budgets, and various in-year budgetary reports are available, although they are not necessarily easily accessible or regularly published. In Montenegro and Serbia, the transparency is undermined by the fact that mid-year reports are unpublished, the same as in the 2017/18 cycle. At the same time, reports are the least comprehensive in these two administrations as they mostly focus on economic expenditures, unlike in the rest of the region where they provide more data by budget users and government functions. In North Macedonia and Kosovo, budget transparency is enhanced with new, citizen-friendly budget portals. Still, there is no progress regarding the publication of non-financial performance information, with Albania remaining the only example where such data is available for line ministries. Citizen budgets are yet to be produced in Montenegro, and annual budgets are available in open format in North Macedonia only.

PIFC transparency in the region remains unchanged and opportunities for public scrutiny are quite limited. Although ministries of finance (except for Kosovo) publish annual consolidated reports, the proactive publication of internal audit quality reviews is entirely absent outside of Serbia. Regarding internal control policies, monitoring shows no tangible improvements as ministries still do not disclose even basic information through their websites. The Parliamentary Assembly in BIH was the only legislature to regularly review annual PIFC reports in this monitoring cycle.

Central authorities regularly publish annual reports on public procurements, except for BIH. Reporting is mostly reader-friendly and with various statistical and qualitative insights. In addition, all the central authorities in the region run procurement portals with different user functions and content, but full access to tender documents is possible for registered users only in most cases. Reporting by ministries is significantly less transparent, as they publish annual procurement plans more often than reports, with those in Montenegro being the most consistent. Most central authorities do not publish open data on their websites, but procurement portals in Kosovo and Serbia allow for the export of open data. In 2019, open procedures with publishing of a call represented the main method for implementing procurements, representing over 90% in three cases, and slightly below in two cases (for BIH data was unavailable).

Finally, across the region, SAIs have considerably strengthened their public communication. In Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, they implement communication strategies. All SAIs have at least one job position tasked with public communication, this time with no exceptions in the region. These institutions are diversifying the tools they use to inform the public, with three of them actively using social media, and all of them producing tailored products, more accessible to citizens. Importantly, citizen-friendly audit summaries are more common, and the SAIs in BIH, Montenegro, and Serbia publish simplified versions of all, or the majority, of audit reports. As previously, SAIs generally accept citizen complaints and suggestions, yet only in Albania and North Macedonia are there channels explicitly dedicated to the submission of audit tips. Finally, the majority of SAIs consult with CSOs, with Kosovo's KNAO regularly holding (and formalising in 2020) civil society forums to discuss audit priorities.

CONCLUSION: NO LEAD CONTESTANT IN THE REGIONAL PAR RACE

In implementing its independent PAR monitoring of a set of Principles of Public Administration endorsed by the EU, WeBER emphasises those aspects of administration that are visible to public, and that citizens can easily relate to, such as transparency, openness, inclusiveness, accessibility, and accountability. The PAR Monitor methodology covers all six areas of PAR defined by the SIGMA Principles and assesses each WB administration in the same manner to allow for regional comparison and benchmarking, fostering peer pressure as well as peer learning among the region's governments. The second cycle of the PAR Monitor makes it possible to follow trends and make comparisons with past results. While the baseline monitoring exercise was conducted in the period from September 2017 to September 2018, the second cycle, the results of which are discussed in this report, was conducted between February and December 2020. It should be noted that based on methodological changes explained in this report (including major revisions in the PDC area, and the addition of a new indicator on public procurement in the PFM area), the maximum possible total score in this monitoring cycle was higher than that of the baseline exercise, at 611 points compared to 581.

This second PAR Monitor shows that when it comes to prioritising citizens in their administrative reforms the governments in the region still face similar challenges and drawbacks to those identified in the baseline report. An exception, to an extent, is found in the service delivery area, where in most cases citizens have recognised improvements, with resulting higher indicator scores and values. Yet, similar results for most indicators in the two monitoring cycles lead to two main conclusions. First, that tangible improvements in the citizen-facing elements of PAR that WeBER looks at take more than two years to materialise. Second, that in all areas of PAR (with the exception of service delivery), governments in the region are still predominantly focused on internal reforms, such as those aimed at improving capacities or streamlining processes and procedures.

Nevertheless, the results from this PAR Monitor edition do reveal some notable developments, some positive and others negative. As presented in this report's featured good practices and those to avoid, administrations have in some cases discontinued what was previously deemed good practice. Such backsliding demonstrates the fragility of administrations' practices and the necessity to continue to commit to maintaining sufficient levels of transparency and openness towards citizens, needed to move forward in the EU accession process. That said, results once again suggest that the governments most advanced in the EU accession process – Montenegro and Serbia – do not necessarily take a lead in PAR in general, or in individual reform areas. At the same time, other administrations have not made great advances either, and have in some cases even backslid.[232]

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232   The PFM results, on the first look, may suggest greater advances by North Macedonia and Montenegro, but those leaps are owed to the introduction of a new public procurement indicator for the most part.

Looking back, the administrations in BIH, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia gained higher total scores on average for the entire PAR Monitor, with North Macedonia and Montenegro making the most notable progress. As in the previous monitoring cycle, Albania emerges as slightly ahead of the rest of the region with the highest score (226), although expressed in percentage, having a decrease of 5 percentage points since the baseline PAR Monitor (from 42% to 37% of available points). BIH still lags behind the others with only 32% of available points, despite a total increase of 6 percentage points – yet with overall performance in this cycle much closer to the regional average (35%). North Macedonia and Serbia are in second and third place, with 36% achieved, and 219 and 218 points, respectively. Together with BIH, Kosovo and Montenegro are slightly below the regional average with 34% in both cases. Altogether, this monitoring cycle displayed more even results regionally, with no administration standing out from the WB average significantly.

Graph 26: Total scores and percentage achievement in each administration for all WeBER indicators for the 2019/2020 monitoring cycle
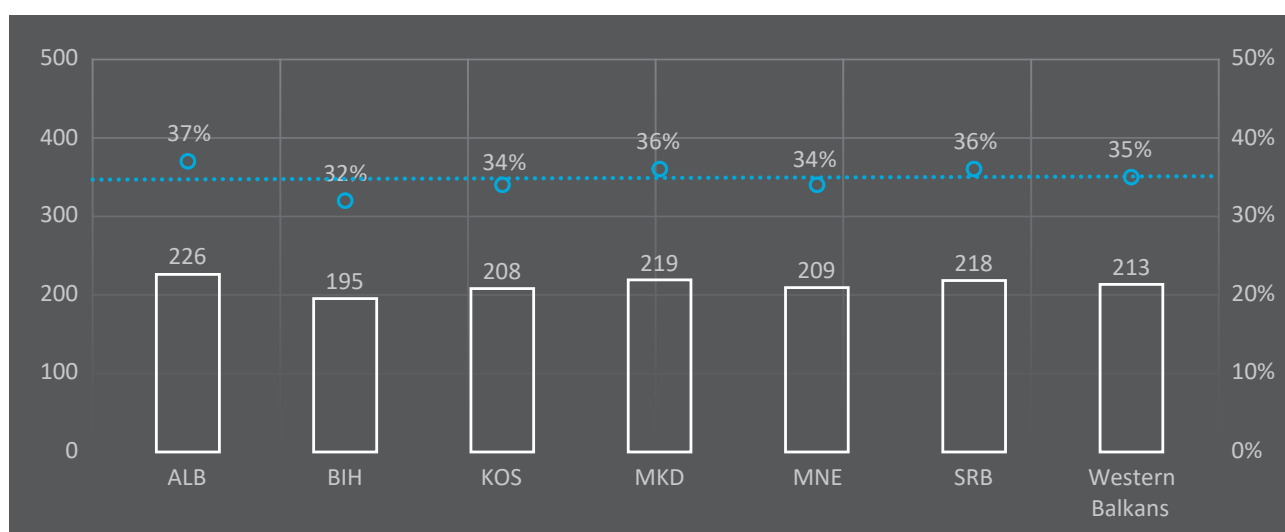
In terms of how the entire region fares in the individual PAR areas, PAR Monitor 2019/2020 once again observes that administrations in the WB have accomplished the most in the same two areas as before - service delivery and public financial management (Graph 27 below). Regarding PFM, its most positive assessment is owed, above all, to the enhanced external communication practices by supreme audit institutions in the region. Higher scores in service delivery, on the other hand, mostly relate to positive public perceptions. PFM and service delivery also represent the only PAR areas for which administrations have achieved at least half of the available points across all WeBER indicators, which is indicative of only moderate performance in these areas and poorer performance in the others.

Namely, in the public service and HRM area, very limited advancement has been recorded since the 2017/18 monitoring cycle, which speaks of a largely unchanged situation in the region. In the PDC area, administrations achieved the same results as previously (25%). PDC is still the area with the lowest scores, despite a revision in the indicator on public consultations in policy documents and legislation, striking a balance between perception data and document-based evidence on practical implementation. Finally, in the areas of accountability and strategic framework for PAR, achievements remain below 30% of total possible points, with slight percentage decreases for both.

Graph 27: Average regional achievement of results per PAR area for the 2019/2020 monitoring cycle

□ % of average WB achievement per area

Area	%
SFPAR	29%
PDC	25%
PSHRM	30%
ACC	27%
SD	52%
PFM	54%
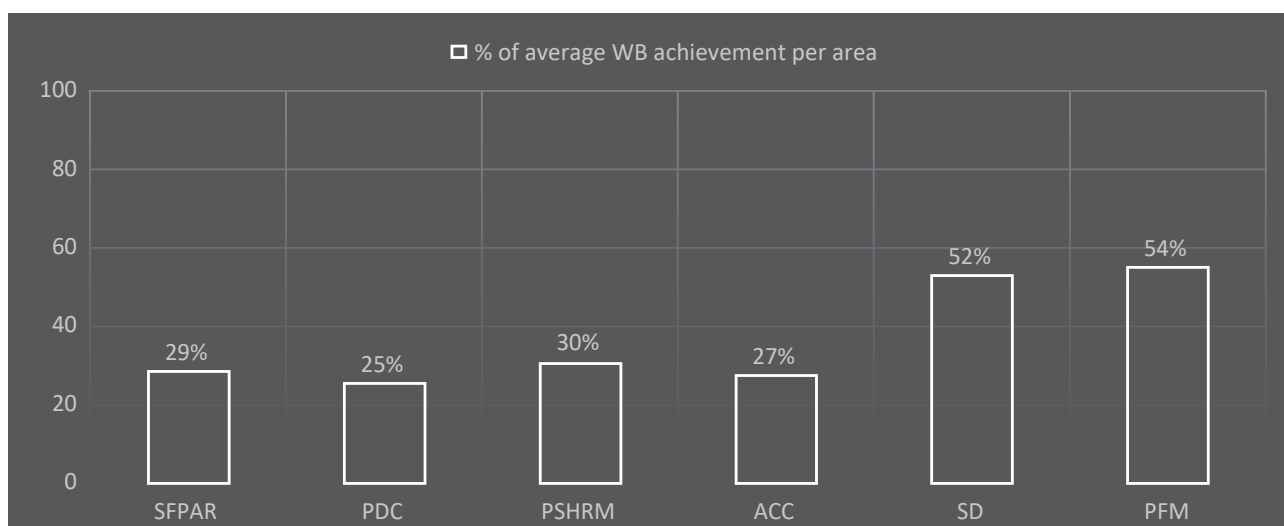
REGIONAL LEADERS AND LAGGARDS ACROSS THE SIX PAR AREAS: A BIT OF RESHUFFLING

Compared to the baseline PAR Monitor, the results of this cycle show the same leaders in three PAR areas and new ones in the other three. On one hand, this demonstrates reshuffling of priorities in WB administrations. On the other hand, however, in the PAR areas where the same countries have retained the top positions, their overall performance has not improved but has slightly backslid when expressed in the percentage of total points achieved (see Charts 42). Such regional (re)positioning is an indication of the volatility of reform in general and, importantly, the necessity to focus on improving in the most critical areas as well as on keeping up with positive developments in the areas assessed as more advanced. Based on the results of this monitoring cycle:

- Montenegro retains the leaders' position in the region when it comes to the inclusion of civil society in PAR development and coordination processes, and Kosovo stays at the bottom. This monitoring cycle recorded slight deterioration in the entire region, with incremental improvements in BIH and Serbia only.

- BIH has taken the lead in the PDC area from Kosovo, though Kosovo remains a very close runner up. In BIH, improved practices of reporting to the public by the BIH Council of Ministers, as well as slightly better results regarding public consultation practices have put it at the regional top. Albania fares the worst in this monitoring cycle for reasons of lack of governmental reporting to the public and opaque decision-making processes.

- Albania remains the leader in the public service and HRM area, performing far better than the regional average. Nevertheless, good practices of depoliticisation and transparency observed in Albania in the baseline PAR Monitor have not improved in the last two years, so Albania now scores fewer total points. Montenegro has shifted from the back of the queue and is now performing above the regional average, with Kosovo taking the last position.

- Serbia still leads in accountability indicators, but not as convincingly as before, with a tangible drop in its total score. Nevertheless, some of the positive practices of information provision identified in the baseline monitoring cycle continue, giving it a slight advantage compared to the rest of the region. In North Macedonia, proactive information provision by public authorities has improved since the previous monitoring cycle, leaving Montenegro to occupy the last place, with no observed improvements.

- Serbia also emerges as the leader in the service delivery area, with a slightly better result than Kosovo and North Macedonia. Except for Albania, which fell from the first to the fourth position, administrations across the region have recorded progress, owing to high citizen satisfaction with service delivery practices. In Kosovo and Serbia, in addition, service providers have been publishing more information online about the services they offer. BIH still lags behind its regional peers in this area, although the public has expressed a more positive stance there too as compared to the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor.

- Finally, North Macedonia has emerged as the new frontrunner in the PFM area, surpassing both Albania and Kosovo, which were the leading administrations in the previous cycle. Although in this monitoring cycle a new indicator on public procurement was added and therefore total scores are not directly comparable, it is of note that four administrations in the region owe better scores to their supreme audit institutions' enhanced communication with the public (with the exceptions being Albania and Kosovo), rather than to the results of WeBER's new public procurement indicator. This positive practice in North Macedonia, and a continued high level of budget transparency, have paved the way for its top position. At the same time, BIH, Montenegro, and Serbia remain, as in the baseline monitoring cycle, below the regional average.

Charts 42: Comparison of total scores and regional averages in each PAR area, with percentages achieved in 2017/2018 in blue and in 2019/2020 monitoring cycles in orange

Lastly, when developments across all six areas are observed at the level of individual administrations, the picture looks as follows:

- Albania has declined in all areas but PFM in terms of total scores achieved.
- BIH has advanced across all six areas of WeBER indicators.
- Kosovo is stagnating or declining in all but SD, with a sharp performance drop in PDC.
- North Macedonia has advanced in four out of six areas, with declines noted in SFPAR and public service and HRM.
- In Montenegro, slight improvements are noted in all areas but SFPAR which has somewhat deteriorated (though it still holds a lead position in this area).
- Serbia has slightly improved or is stagnating in all areas except for ACC where its performance has markedly dropped since the baseline PAR Monitor.

A WAY FORWARD: IMPROVING ON WHAT IS THERE AND STRIVING FOR MORE

From the publishing of the first regional PAR Monitor in 2018, WeBER's intention has been to inspire regional dialogue and experience exchanges in the WB. By highlighting comparative strengths and weaknesses, this report calls on administrations in the region to work on overcoming their challenges as well as on maintaining and building on their strengths, in order to foster more successful EU accession processes and more importantly, citizen-oriented administrations. The regional PAR Monitor therefore does not provide country-specific recommendations, which are rather presented in the national PAR Monitor reports. Instead, through regional comparisons and the presentation of meticulously collected evidence, this regional report hopes to encourage regional peer learning and positive competition, as well as offer some suggestions for the future strategic orientation of key stakeholders in the PAR area. Most of the suggestions made in the 2017/2018 PAR Monitor remain valid today, while some of the practices established since the previous monitoring cycle can be further developed:

- Over the past two years, WeBER partners have frequently contributed data and recommendations to assessments performed by the European Commission and SIGMA, which has allowed for a substantial evidence and civil-society-based impact on PAR in the region. Therefore, the EC, and SIGMA are encouraged to keep consulting with CSOs and using WeBER results, which are complementary to their work. New synergies and joint initiatives aimed at bringing PAR closer to citizens in the region can also be explored.
- During the first WeBER project, the EC established an informal practice of consulting civil society organisations ahead of PAR Special Groups' meetings.[233] This practice should become standardised across the region and, if possible, institutionalised by the EC. Although WeBER can provide a wide range of data and input through such consultations, the EC should aim to involve in them a wider circle of CSOs, and the WeBER Platform's National PAR Working Groups can help coordinate more input and contributions from civil society.
- WeBER monitoring, as well as other civil-society-driven monitoring initiatives offer a valuable civil society perspective on PAR, which helps open administrations to a greater extent for the citizens' voices. Governments in the WB should, therefore, continue to explore WeBER's results as well, and to a greater extent than before. While WeBER partners will continue to advocate widely for their results and national-level recommendations, the EC and SIGMA can also contribute more to incentivise governments in the region to be more open and sensitive to input from civil society.
- WeBER will continue to seek opportunities to partner with other regional-level organisations, such as the Regional School for Public Administration and the Regional Cooperation Council, in order to create new avenues for dialogue and exchange on relevant PAR issues. These regional organisations are also invited to consult civil society whenever possible and to consider possible synergies between the findings from civil society and their own initiatives. For example, WeBER indicators and results could prove quite useful in setting up the monitoring framework for relevant segments of the upcoming SEE 2030 strategy that is being developed by the RCC.

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233 PAR Special Groups have been established under the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) as forums for policy dialogue on PAR between the Commission and governments in WB.

Finally, the WeBER2.0 project has also introduced two new components, aimed at further extending the impact of PAR. The first concerns a pilot effort to monitor how the SIGMA principles most relevant for citizens and civil society are observed in the development and implementation of sectoral policies. This new exercise, called "sectoral PAR mainstreaming," seeks to help embed PAR principles more deeply in policy and institutional settings in the WB. CSOs in the region as well as other regional and EU-level PAR stakeholders can greatly contribute to the success of this new initiative and its further dissemination after the pilot phase is completed. They can do so by creating opportunities to present the results of the pilot exercise, by supporting the further development of tools and instruments for sectoral PAR mainstreaming as well as by further capacity building and awareness raising among CSOs in the region.

The second new WeBER2.0 component includes citizens of the region directly into the PAR monitoring process, through six online portals where citizens can easily share personal stories on what they see as issues or positive developments in dealing with administrations.[234] WB governments, WeBER2.0 partners and associates, CSOs and other PAR stakeholders are encouraged to share information about this campaign, running until spring 2022. By doing so, they will help the WeBER2.0 project amplify citizens' voices in PAR and contribute to the creation of more citizen-centric administrations in the region, which is the ultimate goal of the entire WeBER initiative.

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234 The citizen portal can be accessed at: https://citizens.par-monitor.org/

METHODOLOGY APPENDIX

The PAR Monitor methodology was developed by the WeBER research team and was thoroughly consulted among the WeBER expert associates. In accordance with the methodological changes described in this report, methodology is based on 22 SIGMA Principles (as opposed to 21 in the baseline monitoring cycle), and 23 compound indicators are used to monitor these principles within six key areas of PAR.

The PAR Monitor methodology document provides details on the overall approach of the WeBER monitoring, the process of methodology development, the selection of the principles that the WeBER project monitors and the formulations of indicators with descriptions of methodological approaches. Detailed information for the measurement of each indicator is provided in separate indicator tables. Each indicator table contains the following: formulation, weight, data sources, methodology/description what a given element measures and how, and point allocation rules. Finally, each indicator table provides the conversion table for turning the scores from all elements into the final indicator values on the scale from 0 to 5.

PAR Monitor Methodology, and indicator tables are available on the following link: https://www.par-monitor.org/par-monitor-methodology/.

The data from all six individual administrations are used and compared. These data were collected through the following methods:

- Focus groups
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Public perception survey
- Survey of civil servants
- Survey of civil society organisations
- Analysis of official documentation, data, and official websites
- Requests for free access to information.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted for collecting qualitative inputs from stakeholders for certain indicators. Focus group data are most often use to complement or corroborate data collected by other research tools. More specifically, the PAR monitor methodology anticipated focus groups for:

- Strategic Framework for PAR, with civil society organisations (for indicators SFPAR_P1_I1, SFPAR_P2&4_I1)
- Policy Development and Coordination, with civil society organisations (covering PDC_P5_I2, PDC_P6_I1, PDC_P10_I1, PDC_P11_I1)
- Public Service and Human Resource Management, with former candidates who previously applied for a job in central state administration bodies (for indicator PSHRM_P3_I1)
- Accountability, with civil society organisations (for indicator ACC_P2_I1), and
- Service Delivery, with civil society organisations specifically dealing with accessibility issues, vulnerable groups, and persons with disabilities (for indicator SD_P4_I1).

The selection of participants was based on purposive non-probability sampling which targeted CSOs, or other target groups, with expert knowledge on the issue in question. Following focus groups were held:

Table 48: Focus groups conducted at the WB level

Administration	Group	No. of FGs	PAR Area
ALB	Civil society	3	Service Delivery; Policy Development and Coordination
BIH	Civil society	2	Policy Development and Coordination; Service Delivery,
KOS	Civil society	1	Strategic Framework of PAR; Policy Development and Coordination; Accountability
MKD	Civil society	1	Strategic Framework of PAR
MKD	Former candidates for job position in central administration	1	Public Service and Human Resource Management
MNE	/	/	/
SRB	Civil society	3	Strategic Framework of PAR; Service Delivery; Policy Development and Coordination; Accountability

INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Interviews were conducted to collect qualitative inputs from stakeholders on monitored areas. Similar to focus groups, interviews were largely used to complement and verify data collected by other methods. Due to constrains posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews have in certain cases substituted focus groups as data sources.

Interviews were semi-structured, composed of a set of open-ended questions which allowed for a discussion with interviewees and on-the-spot sub-questions. Selection of interviewees was based on purposive, non-probability sampling and targeted experts relevant for a given thematic area.

Overall, a total of 61 interviews was held during the monitoring period. Interviewees were given a full anonymity in terms of any personal information, in order to ensure higher response rate and facilitate open exchange.

Table 49: Interviews conducted at WB level:

Administration	Interviewee (number of interviews)	PAR Area
ALB	Representative of DoPA (3)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Former civil service candidate (4)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Senior civil servant (1)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Representative of SAI (1)	Public Finance Management
BIH	Former civil service candidate (4)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Representative of PARCO (1)	Strategic Framework for PAR
	Director of CSA (1)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Expert in civil service area (2)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Senior civil servants, former and current (5)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Representative of SAI (1)	Public Finance Management
KOS	Representative of CSO (1)	Strategic Framework for PAR
	Former civil service candidates (2)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Senior civil servant (4)	Public Service and Human Resource Management; Strategic Framework for PAR
MKD	Senior civil servants, former and current (6)	Strategic Framework for PAR; Public Service and Human Resource Management
	Representative of SAI (1)	Public Finance Management
	Representative of MoF/CHU (1)	Public Finance Management
MNE	Representatives of CSO (7)	Strategic Framework for PAR, Policy Development and Coordination, Service Delivery
	Senior civil servants (5)	Strategic Framework for PAR, Public Service and Human Resource Management, Public Finance Management
	Former civil service candidates (3)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
SRB	Representatives of CSO (1)	Strategic Framework for PAR
	Civil servants, former and current (6)	Public Service and Human Resource Management; Strategic framework of PAR
	Experts (1)	Public Service and Human Resource Management
	SAI representative (1)	Public finance management

PUBLIC PERCEPTION SURVEY

The public perception survey is based on a questionnaire targeting the general public (18+ permanent residents) in the Western Balkans. The survey was conducted through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) in combination with computer assisted web interviewing (CAWI), using a three-stage random representative stratified sampling (primary sampling unit, polling station territories, secondary sampling unit: households, tertiary sampling unit: household member).

The survey was conducted between 15th and 30th May 2020. At WB level, the margin of error for the total sample of 6085 citizens is ±3.13%, at the 95% confidence level.

Table 50: Public perception survey methodology framework

Location	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia
Time	15 – 30 May, 2020
Data Collection Method	CATI in combination with CAWI
Sampling Frame	Entire 18+ population of permanent residents
Sampling	Three stage random representative stratified sample (PSU: Polling station territories, SSU: Households, TSU: Household member)
Margin of error	Average margin of error is ±3.13% at the 95% confidence level

SURVEY OF CIVIL SERVANTS

Civil servants survey was implemented based on a unified questionnaire targeting civil servants working in the central state administrations of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The questionnaire was translated and adapted to local languages. It generally covered 5 main sections: recruitment of civil servants, temporary engagements in the administration, status of senior civil servants, salary/remuneration and integrity and anti-corruption. Data collection was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire on SurveyMonkey platform.

At WB level, a total of 3827 civil servants participated in the survey, between the second half of June and the beginning of August 2020.

Table 51: Breakdown of the sample for survey of civil servants

	N	% (of observations)
TOTAL	3827	100%
Key groups		
Civil service position		
Senior civil service manager – head of authority	67	2.32
Senior civil service manager – not a head of authority	210	7.27
Non-senior civil service manager (executorial)	705	24.42
Civil servant in non-managerial expert position	1468	50.85
Administrative support civil servant position	127	4.40
Civil servant on fixed-term contract or otherwise temporarily engaged	151	5.23
Political appointment (minister's cabinet or otherwise)	10	0.35
Other	149	5.16
State administration institution		
Ministry	1279	44.30
Subordinate agency	473	16.38
Centre-of-government institution (PM office, government office, government service)	441	15.28
Autonomous agency within the central state administration	357	12.37
Other	337	11.67
Gender		
Male	1067	36.96
Female	1543	53.45
Other	59	2.04
Do not want to respond	218	7.55
Years working in the administration		
Mean = 12.82 years; Range = 0-41 years		
Sector worked before joining the administration		
Local or regional administration	265	9.18
Other branch of power	147	5.09
Public services	408	14.14
International organisation	85	2.94
Non-governmental organisation	105	3.64
Media	50	1.73
Private sector	1061	36.75
This was my first job	447	15.48
Other	319	11.05

Table 52: Margin of error (MoE) per question at the 95% confidence level

Question	MoE range (ALB)	MoE range (BIH)	MoE range (KOS)	MoE range (MKD)	MoE range (MNE)	MoE range (SRB)
Civil servants in my institution are recruited on the basis of qualifications and skills	3.62-3.76	2.41-2.72	2.27-2.60	2.56-2.75	3.52-3.80	3.16-3.28
In the recruitment procedure for civil servants in my institution all candidates are treated equally (regardless of gender, ethnicity, or another personal trait which could be basis for unfair discrimination)	3.85-3.99	2.51-2.85	2.47-2.82	2.84-3.06	3.88-4.15	3.62-3.74
To get a civil service job in my institution, one needs to have connections	2.62-2.79	3.57-3.87	3.69-3.99	3.17-3.37	2.51-2.79	3.08-3.20
Hiring of individuals on a temporary basis (on fixed-term, service and other temporary contracts) is an exception in my institution	2.99-3.14	2.56-2.85	2.53-2.86	2.34-2.51	3.89-3.18	2.60-2.72
Individuals who are hired on a temporary basis perform tasks which should normally be performed by civil servants	3.19-3.41	3.29-3.67	3.54-3.92	3.81-4.05	3.12-3.52	3.77-3.94
Such contracts get extended to more than one year	2.18-2.34	2.89-3.22	2.56-3.86	3.49-3.66	2.59-2.73	3.61-3.73
When people are hired on a temporary basis, they are selected based on qualifications and skills	3.53-3.71	2.84-3.19	1.97-2.26	2.70-2.91	3.58-3.91	3.39-3.53
Individuals hired on a temporary basis go on to become civil servants after their temporary engagements	2.77-2.92	3.37-3.57	3.01-3.32	3.12-3.28	3.37-3.64	3.18-3.29
The formal rules for hiring people on a temporary basis are applied in practice	3.65-3.82	3.02-3.35	2.76-3.08	3.24-3.44	4.07-4.34	3.67-3.80
Procedures for appointing senior civil servants ensure that the best candidates get the jobs in my institution	3.41-3.57	2.02-2.33	2.17-2.49	2.31-2.49	3.32-3.62	2.88-3.01
In my institution, senior civil servants would implement illegal actions if political superiors asked them to do so	2.89-3.12	3.67-4.07	3.72-4.09	3.51-3.78	2.76-3.21	3.74-3.93
Senior civil servants can reject an illegal order from a minister or another political superior, without endangering their position	3.27-3.42	2.73-3.02	2.64-2.94	2.96-3.16	3.60-3.84	3.03-3.15
Senior civil service positions are subject of political agreements and "divisions of the cake" among the ruling political parties	2.51-2.67	3.94-4.20	3.56-3.86	3.52-3.72	2.95-3.25	3.36-3.49
Senior civil servants are at least in part appointed thanks to political support	2.74-2.93	3.89-4.18	3.71-3.99	3.81-3.99	3.05-3.82	3.53-3.66
In my institution, senior civil servants participate in electoral campaigns of political parties during elections	2.02-2.21	2.58-2.92	3.31-3.61	3.23-3.45	2.01-2.33	2.45-2.60
In my institution senior civil servants get dismissed for political motives	2.20-2.38	1.81-2.14	3.20-3.49	3.08-3.42	1.77-2.09	2.43-2.58
Formal rules and criteria for dismissing senior civil servants are properly applied in practice	3.67-3.84	3.00-3.38	2.54-2.83	3.08-3.32	4.01-4.28	3.39-3.52
In my institution, bonuses or increases in pay grades are used by managers only to stimulate or reward performance	2.57-2.74	2.15-2.45	2.19-2.49	2.68-2.88	3.19-3.48	2.95-3.08
In my institution, political and personal connections help employees to receive bonuses or increases in pay grades	1.90-2.08	3.25-3.61	3.09-3.46	3.18-3.41	2.16-2.51	2.76-2.90
Integrity and anti-corruption measures in place in my institution are effective in achieving their purpose	3.68-3.80	2.54-2.83	2.78-3.10	2.99-3.18	3.63-3.87	3.38-3.49
Integrity and anti-corruption measures in place in my institution are impartial (meaning, applied to all civil servants in the same way)	3.59-3.73	2.57-2.88	2.48-2.78	2.86-3.06	3.73-3.97	3.37-3.49
If I were to become a whistle-blower, I would feel protected	2.67-2.82	1.85-2.12	2.12-2.43	2.00-2.18	2.40-2.72	2.23-2.35
How important do you think it is that the civil society organisations (NGOs) monitor public administration reform	2.51-2.67	2.03-2.36	1.65-1.98	2.39-2.61	1.78-2.02	2.67-2.81
How important do you think it is that the public (citizens) perceive the administration as depoliticised	1.30-1.41	1.23-1.42	1.19-1.41	1.15-1.26	1.26-1.44	1.37-1.46

SURVEY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

CSO survey results are based on a standardized questionnaire targeting representatives of CSOs working in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The questionnaire included nine sections covering:

1. CSOs' involvement in evidence-based policy-making,
2. Participation in policy- and decision-making,
3. Exercising the right to free access of information,
4. Transparency of decision-making processes,
5. Accessibility and availability of legislation and explanatory materials,
6. CSO's perceptions on government's planning, monitoring and reporting on its work,
7. Effectiveness of mechanisms for protecting the right to good administration,
8. Integrity of public administration, and
9. The accessibility of administrative services.

Data collection was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire on SurveyMonkey platform. At the WB level, a total of 581 CSOs participated in the surveys conducted between 22 June 22 and 4 August 2020.

Table 53: Duration of the survey:

ALB	BIH	KOS	MKD	MNE	SRB
24/06 – 29/07	23/06 – 3/08	23/06 – 04/08	25/06 – 27/07	22/06 – 27/07	23/06 – 24/07

Table 54: Breakdown of the CSO survey sample in at WB level:[235]

	N	% (of observations)
TOTAL	581	100
Key groups		
Type of organisation[232]		
Policy research/Think-tank	168	16.37
Watchdog	100	9.75
Advocacy	228	22.22
Service provider	203	19.79
Grassroot	167	16.28
Other	160	15.59
Field of operation		
Governance and democracy	168	6.05
Rule of law	167	6.01
Human rights	295	10.62
Public administration reform	109	3.93
European integration	149	5.37
Gender issues	156	5.62
Children and youth	238	8.57
Environment and sustainable development	229	8.25
Education	225	8.10
Culture	143	5.15
Health	123	4.43
Media	120	4.32
Economic development	164	5.91
Civil society development	228	8.21
Social services	189	6.81
Other	74	2.66
Year of registration of the CSO		
Mean= 2005; Range=1920-2020		
Position of the respondent in the organisation*		
Senior-level management	371	63.86
Mid-level management	70	12.05
Senior non-management	28	4.82
Mid-level non-management	16	2.75
Other	96	16.52
Years working with the organisation		
Mean=9.89 years; Range=0-41 years		

235 Multiple choice possible.

ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION, DATA, AND OFFICIAL WEBSITES

Monitoring heavily relied on the analysis of official documents publicly available on the websites of the administration bodies. The analysed documents include:
- legislation (laws and bylaws)
- policy documents (strategies, programmes, plans, action plans, etc.)
- official reports (implementation reports, public consultation reports etc.)
- analytical documents (impact assessments, explanatory memorandums to legislation, policy concepts, policy evaluations etc.)
- individual legal acts (decisions, conclusions etc.)
- other documents (agendas, meeting minutes and reports, announcements, guidelines, directives, memorandums etc.).

Additionally, official websites of public authorities were used as sources of data and documents for all indicators, except for the ones completely based on survey data. In certain cases, the websites of public authorities were closely scrutinised as they were the key sources of information and units of analysis.

REQUESTS FOR FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION (FOI)

The PAR monitor methodology relies on publicly available data. Researchers sent FOI requests only in cases where methodology asks for certain institutional practices that could not easily be covered by online available data. Therefore, when an indicator did require information available online, FOI requests were not sent.

That said, the researchers widely used FOI requests as a data collection tool in the following three areas:
1. Policy Development and Coordination (indicators PDC_P6_I1, PDC_P10_I1)
2. Public Service and Human Resource Management (PSHRM_P3_I1, PSHRM_P2_I1)
3. Accountability (ACC_P2_I2).

In certain cases, additional FOI requests were sent for data and information needed in other PAR areas analysed and their indicators, with a total of 170 FOI requests sent at the WB level.

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"WeBER's Western Balkan PAR Monitor is a valuable contribution to better understanding the state of play and developments in regional public administrations. In SIGMA we particularly appreciate it because it builds on the Principles of Public Administration and effectively complements SIGMA's monitoring work without overlaps or duplications. Civil society insights shed a new light on regional public administrations, and I can only hope that the findings will be considered by the governments and will inform their policy decisions."

Gregor Virant

Head of SIGMA Programme,
OECD, and former Minister of
Public Administration of Slovenia

"The PAR Monitor offers a comprehensive, bottom-up insight into the state of public administration reform across the Western Balkans. It is an impressive demonstration of both the capacities and the added value civil society organisations in the region can bring to the domestic reform process."

Natasha Wunsch

Assistant Professor,
Centre for European Studies, Sciences Po

"Taking the perspective of citizens and civil society, the PAR Monitor presents invaluable new evidence and an effective benchmarking tool to assess the quality of public administration in the Western Balkans."

Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling

Professor of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nottingham

"WeBER's Western Balkan PAR Monitor provides high valuable insights on the status quo of Public Administration Reform in the Western Balkan countries. The view of civil society and civil society organisations on the governance, effects and reform of public administration is of highest importance for the future development and the EU-accession of the countries. I am always impressed of the great engagement and profound knowledge of the WeBER team and the Civil Society organisations contributing to the PAR Monitor."

Thomas Prorok

Deputy Managing Director,
Centre for Public Administration Research – KDZ

"The role of the WeBER project in building capacity of civil society organisations and strengthening democratic processes in Western Balkans cannot be underestimated. This will hopefully bring the governments closer to citizens, promote evidence-based policy-making and enable the Western Balkan states to learn from each other."

Tiina Randma-Liiv

Professor and Chair of Public Management and Policy,
Tallinn University of Technology