

# SOCIAL CLIMATE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS (2018-2021)\*

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## ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the results of the World Social Capital Monitor (WSCM), a worldwide open access Social Capital Survey for citizens to better understand the social climate in their countries, for the Western Balkans; Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia between 2018 and 2021. The World Social Capital Monitor was developed by the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics for the United Nations Sustainable Development partnership. Within the UN framework, it is being used for promoting Sustainable Development Goals and has been selected for the SDGs: 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). While all 17 SDGs depend on social goods, assessing and enhancing social goods is one of the few approaches to addressing all the 17 SDGs in one. WSCM consists of open access online survey assessing the social capital of countries around the globe (currently conducted in 50 languages in 300 cities by 2021). Timelines and comments, for eight social goods (climate, trust, measures, taxes, local investment, helpfulness, friendliness, and hospitality) provided by the survey, have been published annually since 2017 for each country affiliated with the WSCM. This work, comparing and contrasting the results of the survey among the Western Balkan Countries between 2018 and 2021, will provide a better understanding of the social climate in the region, involving the impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which is considered the greatest health crisis in the past one hundred years.

**Keywords:** Western Balkans, Social Goods, SDGs, Social Climate, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

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## INTRODUCTION

The World Social Capital Monitor is a worldwide open access Social Capital Survey to better understand the social climate in their countries. It is developed by the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics (BICE) for the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Partnership. The World Social Capital Monitor became a UN partnership project in 2016. The monitor is being used for promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Selected for the SDGs: 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Although all 17 SDGs depend

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on social goods; assessing and enhancing social goods is one of the few approaches to addressing all the 17 SDGs in one (Dill n.d.). Monitor is run based on volunteerism without any budget. The World Social Capital Monitor 2021 covers 300 cities, including results from 177 cities from Africa, including 400 comments from the respondents in total and case studies for towns in Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Cape Verde, Chile, Ethiopia, Germany, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Pakistan and Serbia.

The Monitor consists of an open access online survey assessing the social capital of countries around the globe (URL-1). The survey is available in 50 languages and it has been conducted in 300 cities by 2021. The survey provides timelines and comments for eight social goods; social climate, helpfulness, friendliness, hospitality, interpersonal trust, austerity measures, willingness to pay taxes, local investment, for each country affiliated with the Monitor. The participants in the survey evaluate the social goods in their places in the scale from 1 to 10; 1 representing the lowest and 10 representing the highest (Dill 2021). The monitor considers the local place of the respondent in difference to almost all representative surveys. Hence, the monitor can generate local results starting with the smallest settlements to all the way to cities. The results from the Monitor have been published annually since 2017.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines social capital as a concept “that involves the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks. Social capital revolves around three dimensions: interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation), levels of trust that characterize these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation” (Poteyeva 2018). As the people of the Western Balkans are not very familiar with the concept of social capital, the title of the Monitor has been creating a certain level of reservation with potential respondents. In order to overcome this obstacle, I suggested, as the researcher responsible for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the title of the Monitor to be changed to Social Goods Monitor for the Western Balkans. This change will be implemented as of the second half of 2022 and the survey will be revised in accordance.

### **Analysis of the Results from the Western Balkan Countries (2018-2021)**

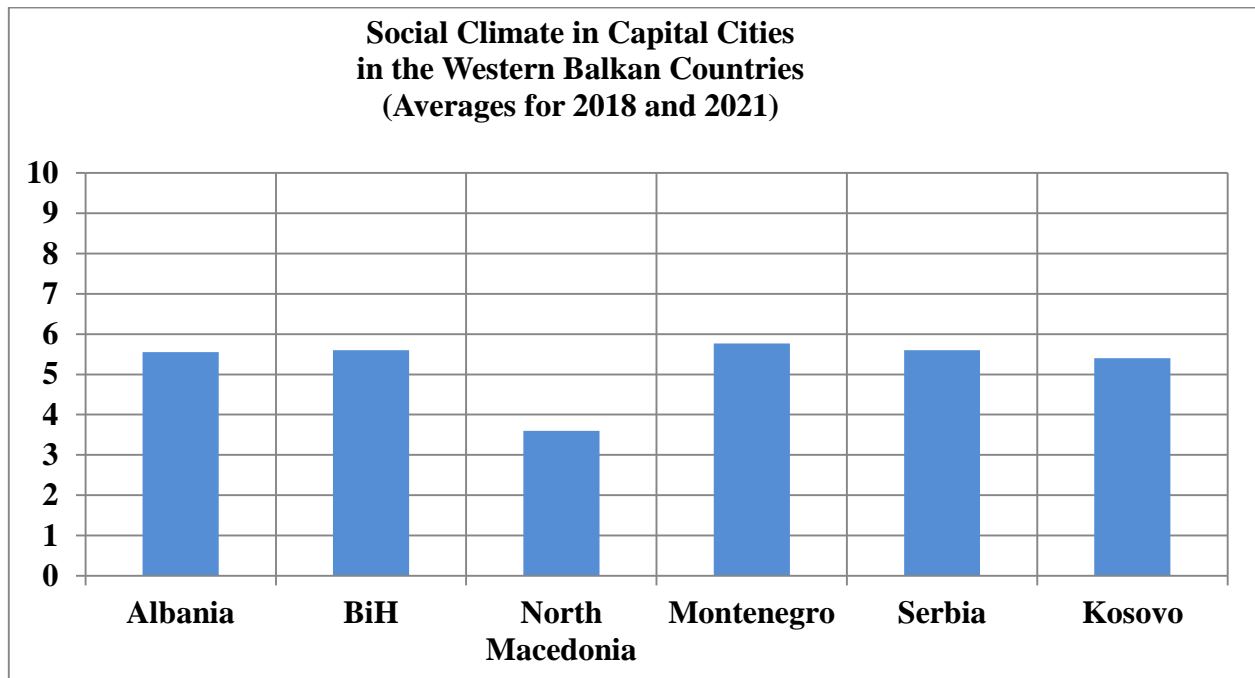
The Western Balkan Countries involved in this work are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. In general, the Western Balkan Countries

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appear with higher number of participants from capital cities than others in the World Social Capital Monitor. Based on this observation, the average results from capital cities of the Western Balkan Countries involved in this research are taken into account as they are more representative at country level. The average results, from the capital cities of the countries analyzed in this work, provide an overall understanding of the social climate in the Western Balkan Countries at national level. The average results shared below are collected from the capital cities; Tirana (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Skopje (North Macedonia), Podgorica (Montenegro), Belgrade (Serbia), and Pristina (Kosovo).<sup>1</sup> The records used in this analysis is based on the yearly reports prepared by the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics to be presented to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Partnerships during the period covered by the research (BICE 2019, 2020, 2021).

### Social Climate



**Chart 1:** Average results for Social Climate from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

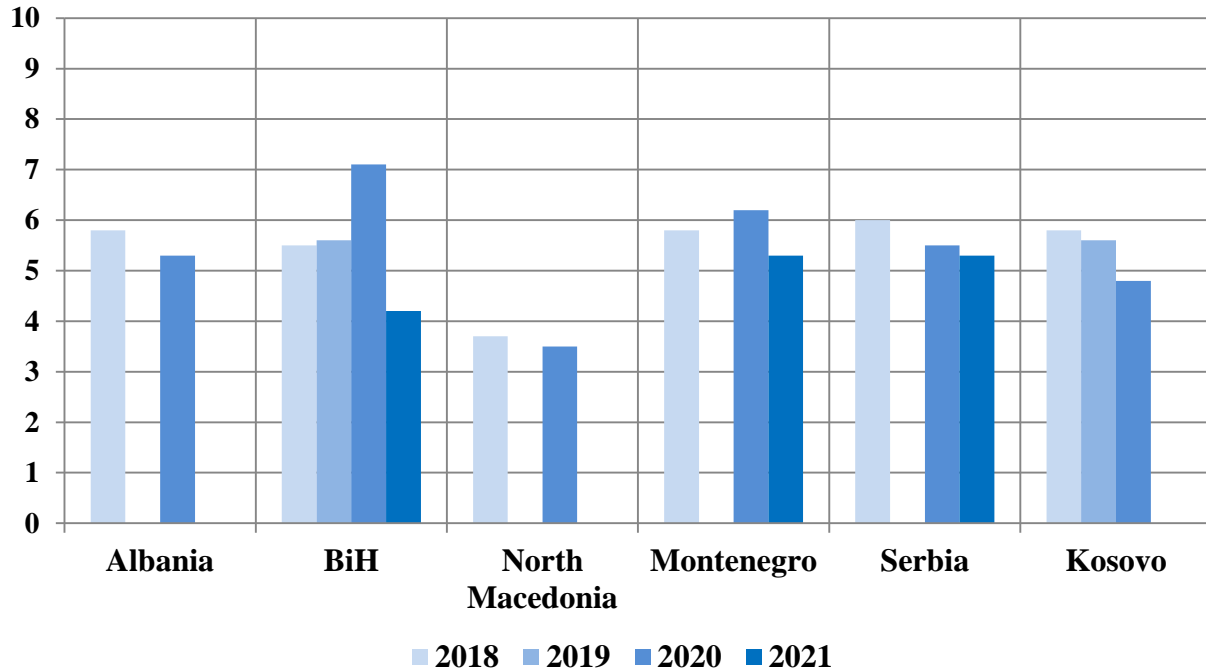
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<sup>1</sup> Pristina has data only for 2018, hence, Kosovo data, covers scores by participants from outside Pristina in general.

The first social good evaluated in the survey is Social Climate: Please characterize the Social Climate of your place? When we look at the average scores for Social Climate for the period 2018 and 2021, it is possible to observe that all capital cities have averages over 5, but North Macedonia (Chart 1). North Macedonia has average scores for social climate only for the years 2018 (3.7) and 2020 (3.5). When we look at the yearly distribution of the country averages for social climate between 2018 and 2021, we observe that the highest result is from Bosnia and Herzegovina for the year 2020 (7) when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak and this is followed by Montenegro and Albania. As the survey is distributed and conducted on voluntary basis, there are certain years where no data is available for social climate for Tirana (2019, 2021), North Macedonia (2019, 2021), Montenegro (2019) , Serbia (2019) and Kosovo (2021) as it can be observed in the chart below:

Among 129 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020, Progress Report to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Partnerships, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 1.7 point increase in comparison to 2018, appears in the fourth place in the ranking of `countries that have improved their social climate in 2020`. It also appears in the twentieth place with the average score of 6.8 over 10 among the `countries with the best social climate` (BICE 2020: 4). Among the Western Balkan Countries included in this research, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest scores for the social climate in 2020.

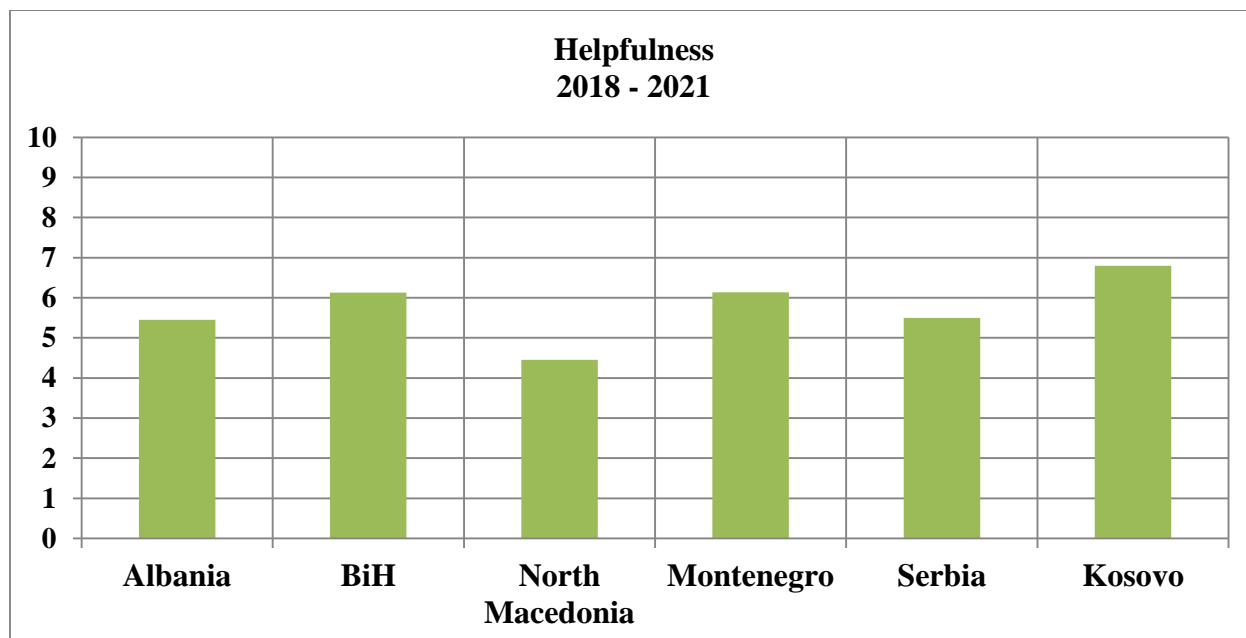
Yearly Distribution of the Averages for Social Climate  
(2018 - 2021)



**Chart 2:** Yearly distribution of the averages for social climate from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

### Helpfulness

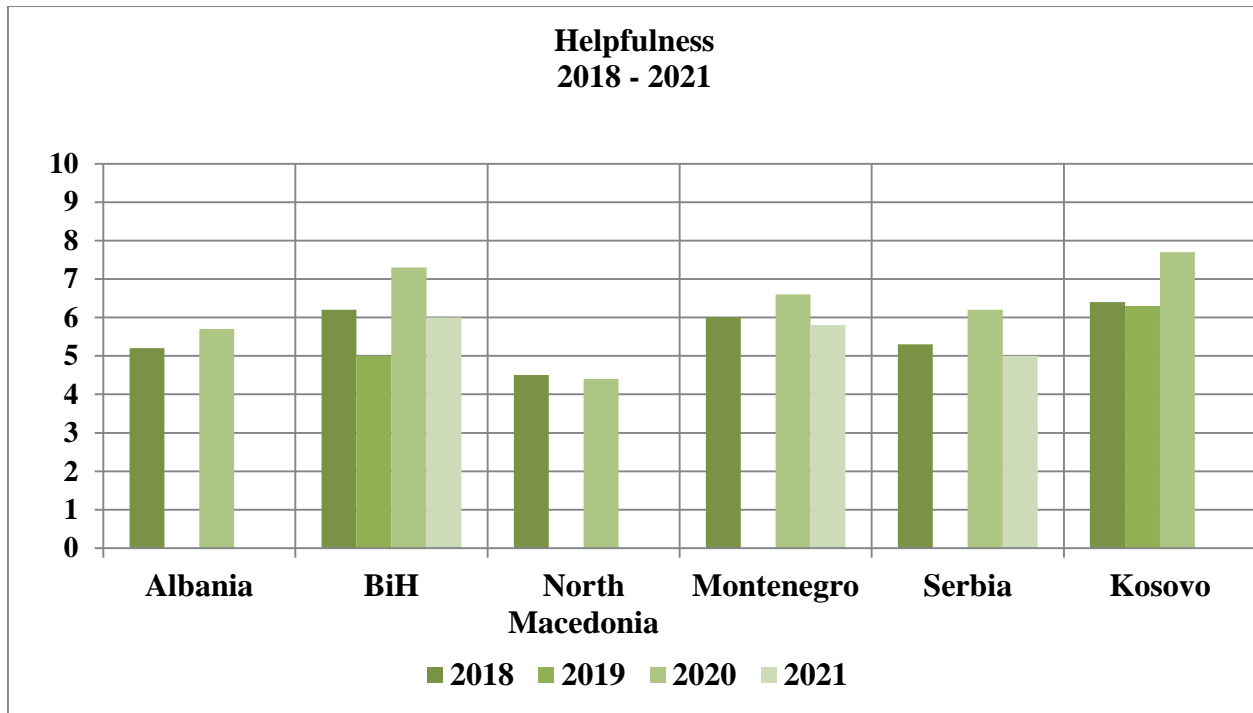
The second social good evaluated in the survey is Helpfulness: Helpfulness across the people? Helpfulness is also evaluated in the same scale from 1 to 10. The averages shared below are representative of the capital cities of the Western Balkan Countries included in this research for the period 2018 and 2021. When we look at the averages for helpfulness for the period 2018 and 2021, we see that the results for all capital cities are above 5, with the only exception of North Macedonia (Chart 3). We observe a similar trend when we look at the yearly distribution of the country averages for Helpfulness from the Western Balkans for the period 2018 and 2021 (Chart 4). Hence, we can conclude that the averages from the capital cities are representative of the national tendency.



**Chart 3:** Averages for Helpfulness from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

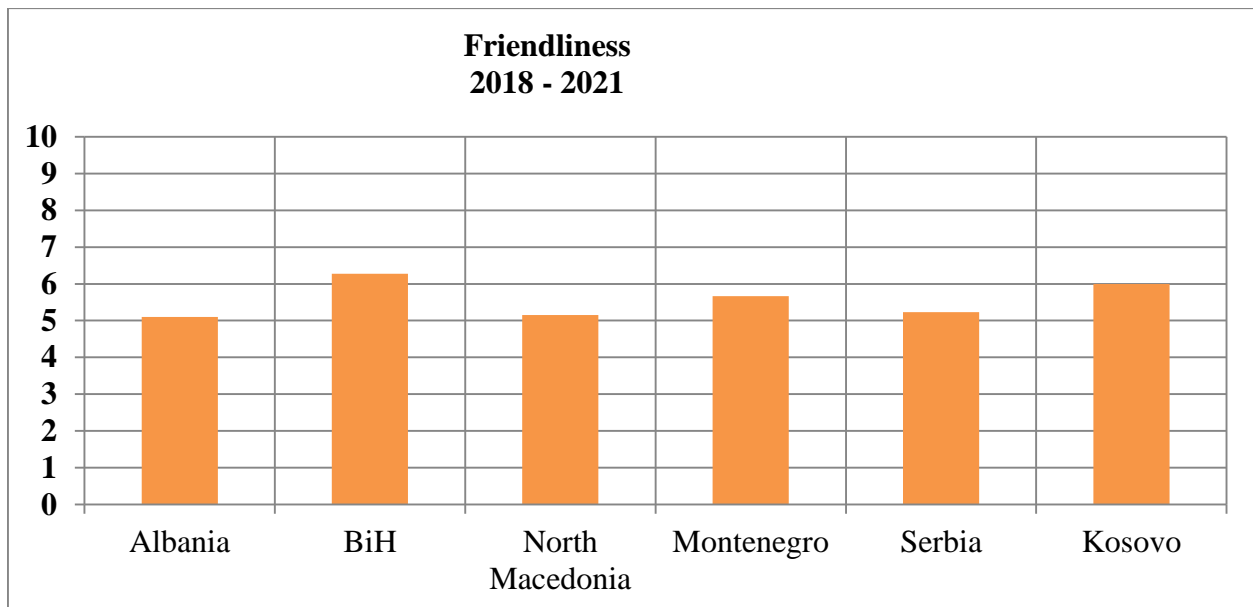
When we look at the yearly distribution of helpfulness, we see that it is the highest in 2020, during the high times of the pandemic, in comparison to the previous and following years for all the Western Balkan countries (Chart 4). The highest scores for helpfulness in 2020 are from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. This is also reflected in the ranking of the top 11 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020: Kosovo appears in the first with 1.4 point progress in comparison to its 2019 score and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the sixth place with 0.9 point increase in comparison to its 2018 score, among the `countries that have improved their helpfulness in 2020`. Among the top 20 countries with the highest level of helpfulness, Kosovo appears as number three with the average score of 7.7 and Bosnia and Herzegovina appears as number 18 with the average score of 7.2. (BICE 2020: 6).

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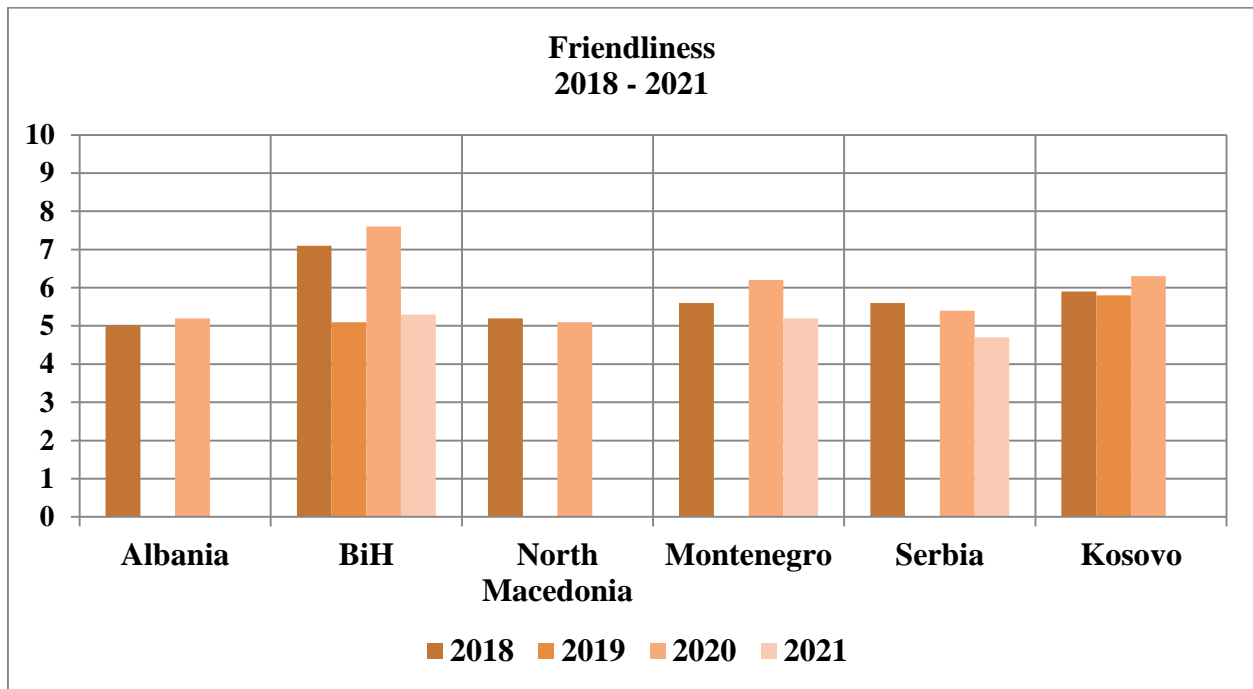
**Chart 4:** Yearly Distribution of The Averages For Helpfulness From Albania (Tirana), Bosnia And Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) And Kosovo (Pristina) For The Period 2018 And 2021.

### Friendliness



**Chart 5:** Averages for Friendliness from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

The third social good evaluated by the survey is the friendliness of the people. The average score for friendliness is 5 and over for all the Western Balkan countries (Chart 5). When we look at the yearly distribution of friendliness, we see that it is the highest in 2020, during the high times of the pandemic, in comparison to the previous and following years for all the Western Balkan countries (Chart 6). The highest score among all the Western Balkan Countries for friendliness is in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020. It also appears as number 7 with 0.7 progress in comparison to 2018 and the only one from the Western Balkans among top 8 countries that have improved their level of friendliness in 2020 (BICE 2020: 7).

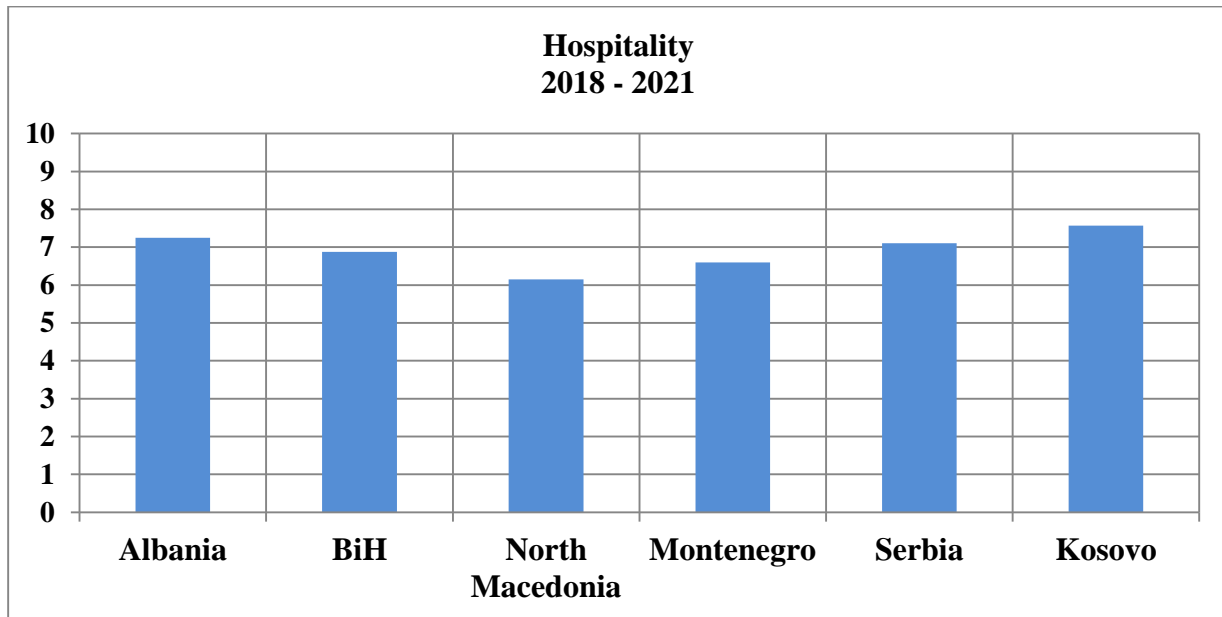


**Chart 6:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Friendliness from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.



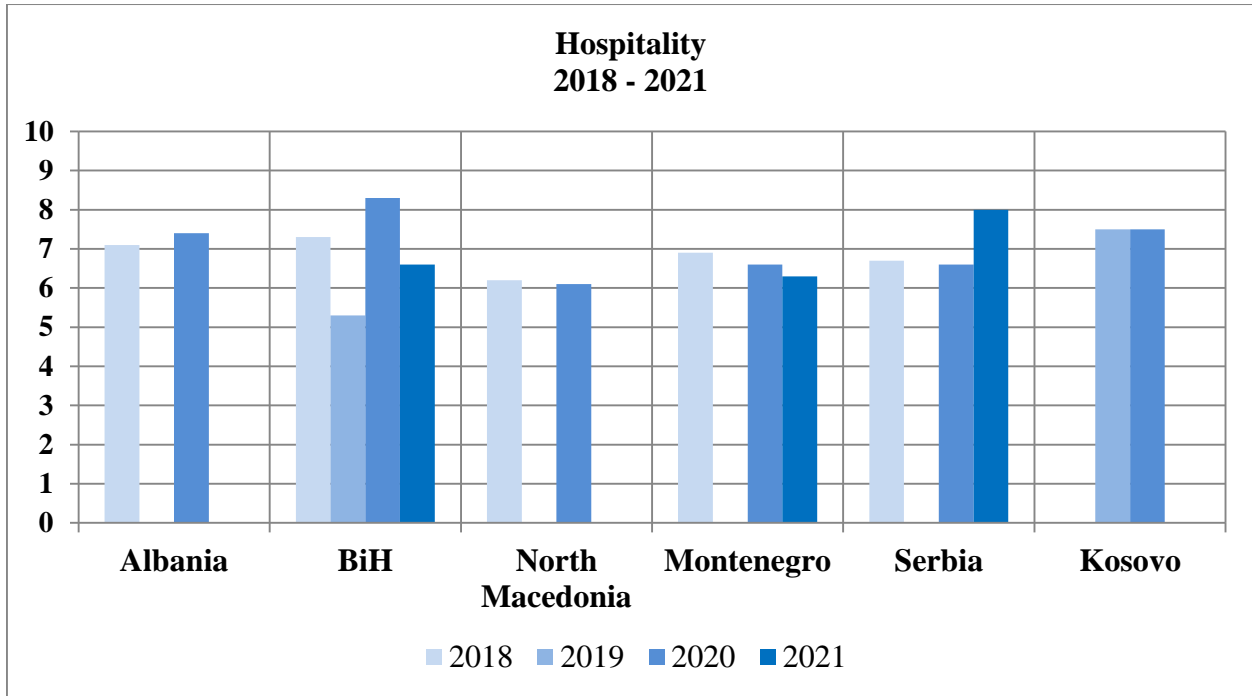
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### Hospitality



**Chart 7:** Averages for Hospitality from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

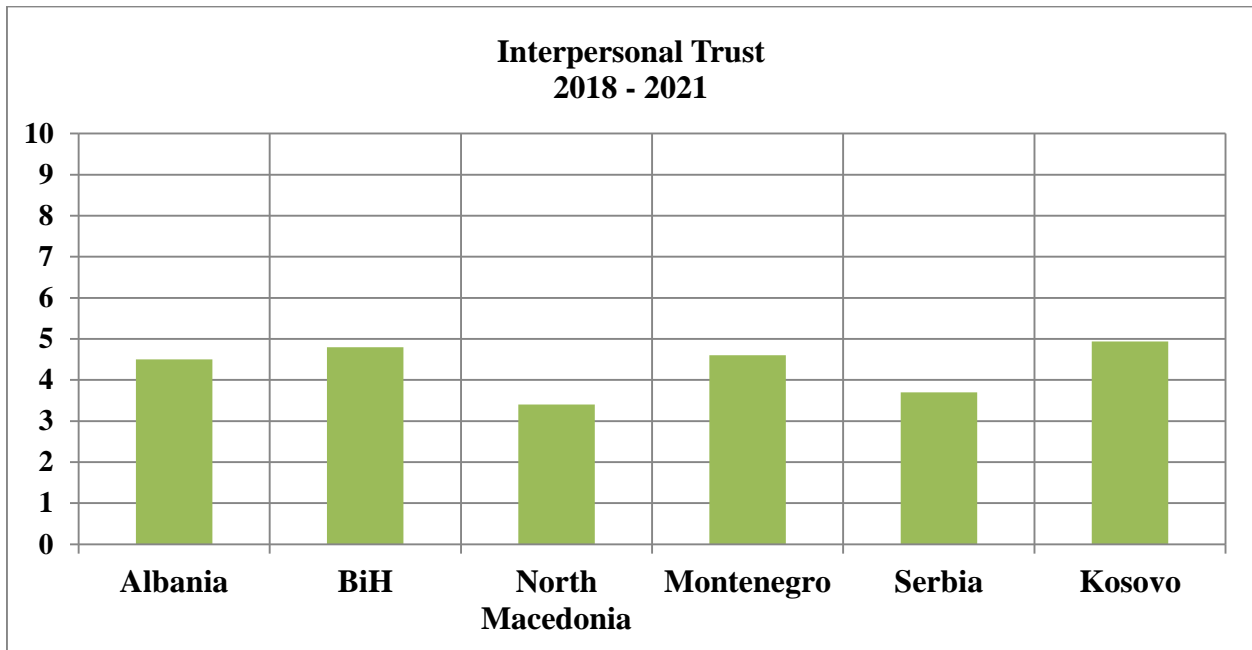
The fourth social good evaluated by the survey is the hospitality of the people. The average scores for hospitality from all Western Balkan countries are over 6. When we look at the yearly distribution of averages for hospitality, we once again observe that the scores are either the highest or very close to the highest in each Western Balkan country in 2020, during the high times of the pandemic. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest score among all the Western Balkan Countries for hospitality, followed by Serbia in 2020. Bosnia and Herzegovina appears as number 2, with 1.3 progress in comparison to 2018, and Serbia, with 0.7 progress in comparison to 2018, as number 7 among top 9 countries that have improved their level of hospitality in 2020. Among the countries with the highest level of hospitality, Bosnia and Herzegovina appears as number 10 with average score of 8.3 over 10 in 2020 (BICE 2020: 7).



**Chart 8:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Hospitality from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

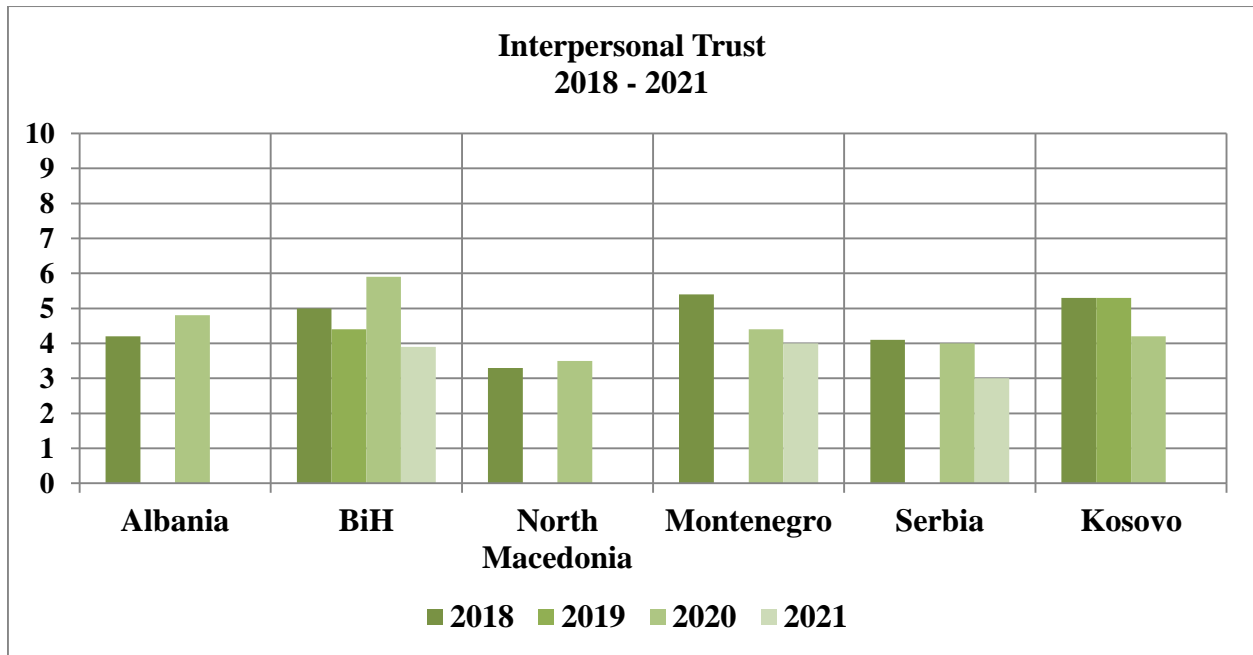
In general, when we look at the average scores for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality, we observe that in general they are 5 or over for the Western Balkan countries. The scores for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality for the year 2020 (high times of pandemic) appear as higher than the previous and following years. Nevertheless, the following section will show that the increase in the investment in the interpersonal relations does not reflect itself in interpersonal trust. Based on these observations, it is possible to argue that the above average quality of interpersonal relations elevates during hard times.

Interpersonal Trust



**Chart 9:** Averages for Interpersonal Trust from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

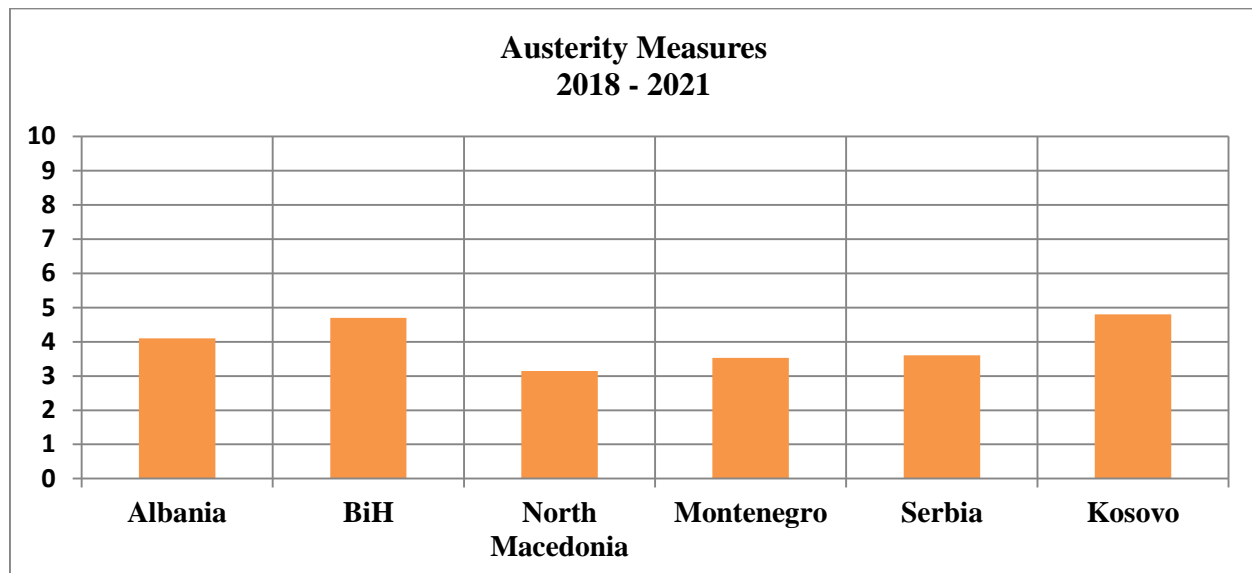
The fifth social good evaluated by the survey is the interpersonal trust among the people. The average scores for interpersonal trust from all Western Balkan countries are below 5. When we look at the yearly distribution of averages for interpersonal trust, we once again observe that the scores are either the highest or very close to the highest in each Western Balkan country in 2020, during the high times of the pandemic. Among 129 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina appears in the fourth place in the ranking of `countries that have improved their interpersonal trust in 2020` with 1.2 point increase in comparison to 2018 (BICE 2020: 4).



**Chart 10:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Interpersonal Trust from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

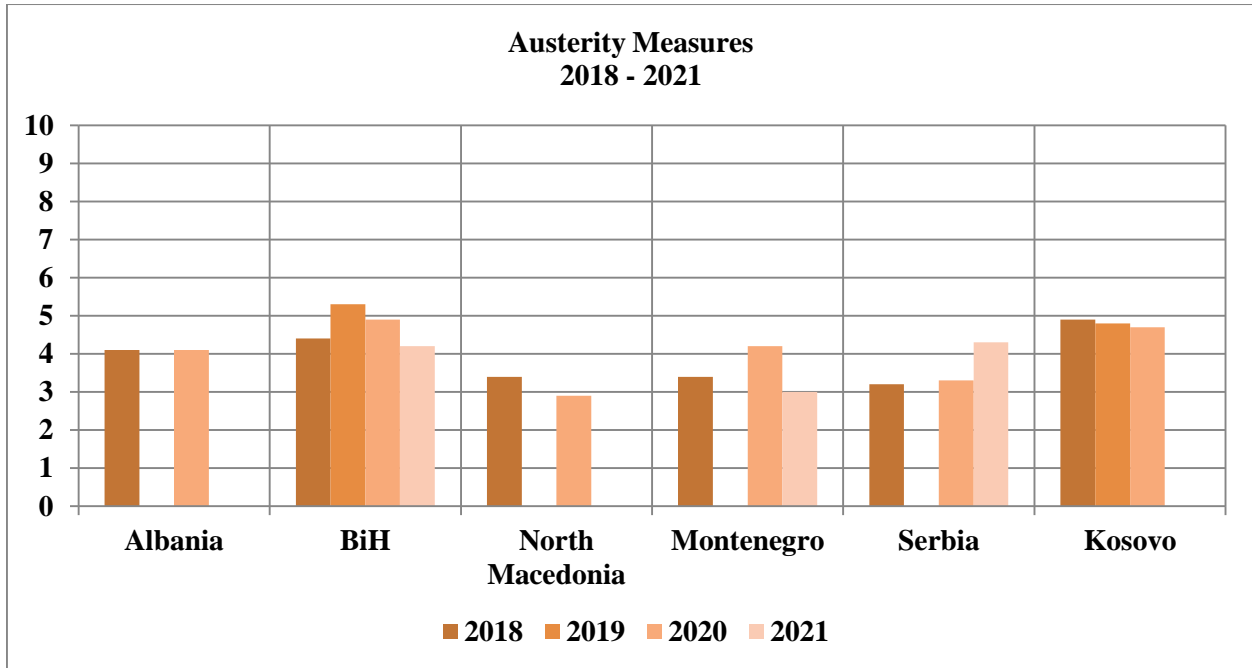
Despite the average scores for interpersonal trust being below 5, with the exception of Kosovo, for all the Western Balkan countries between 2018 and 2021, they appear to be highest in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia in 2020, during the highest times of the pandemic, in comparison to former and following years and relatively higher in Montenegro and Serbia in comparison to 2021 (Chart 10). These results confirm the aforementioned observation that the high average scores, which appear as 5 and over in all the Western Balkan countries in general, for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality, cannot be observed when for interpersonal trust. Nevertheless, the scores for interpersonal trust elevated in majority of the countries. Hence, this observation supports the aforementioned suggestion that people tend to invest more in interpersonal relations during hard times.

**Austerity Measures**



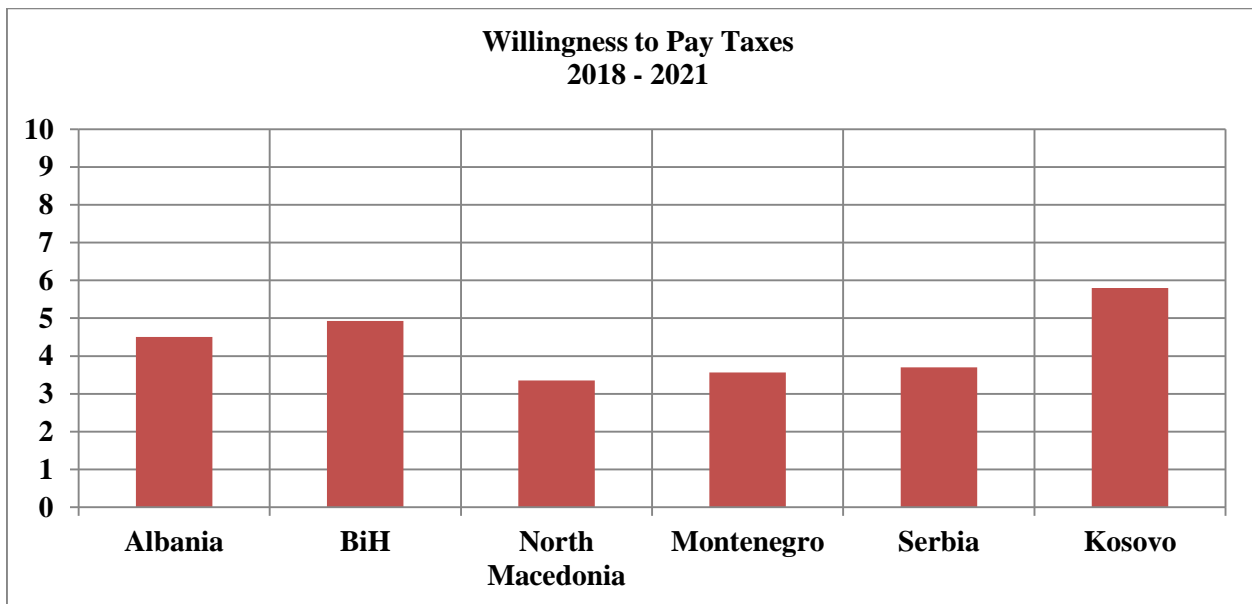
**Chart 11:** Averages for Austerity Measures from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

The question used in the survey to evaluate Austerity Measures is `Will the people accept personal austerity measures in order to finance public goods?` The average scores of the answers to this question are below 5 for all Western Balkan Countries between 2018 and 2021 as it can be observed in the chart 11 above. When we look at the yearly distribution of the averages for Austerity Measures for the Western Balkan Countries, we observe that it was slightly higher than 5 for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019 but below 5 in general (Chart 12). When we compare the results for Austerity Measures with the results for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality, it is possible to suggest that the level of willingness to invest in public goods falls behind the level of willingness to invest in interpersonal relations. Among 129 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 1 point increase in comparison to the previous year 2019, appears in the sixth place in the ranking of `countries that have improved their willingness to accept austerity measures in 2020` and as the only country from the Western Balkans (BICE 2020: 5).



**Chart 12:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Austerity Measures from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

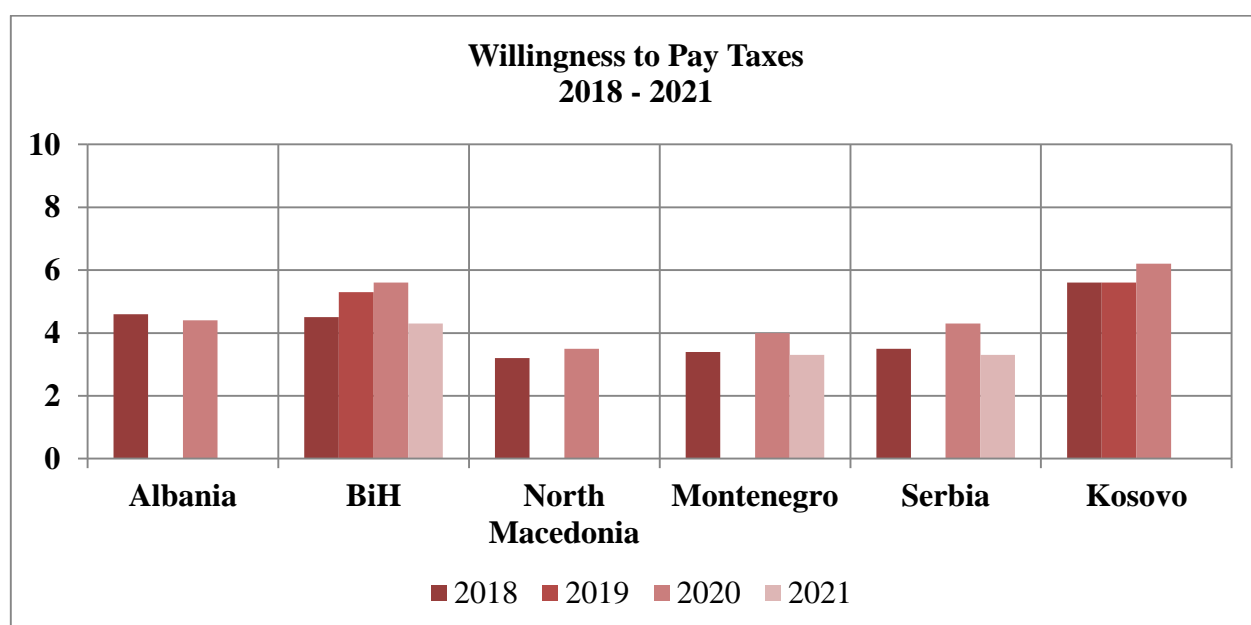
### Willingness to Pay Taxes



**Chart 13:** Averages for Willingness to Pay Taxes from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

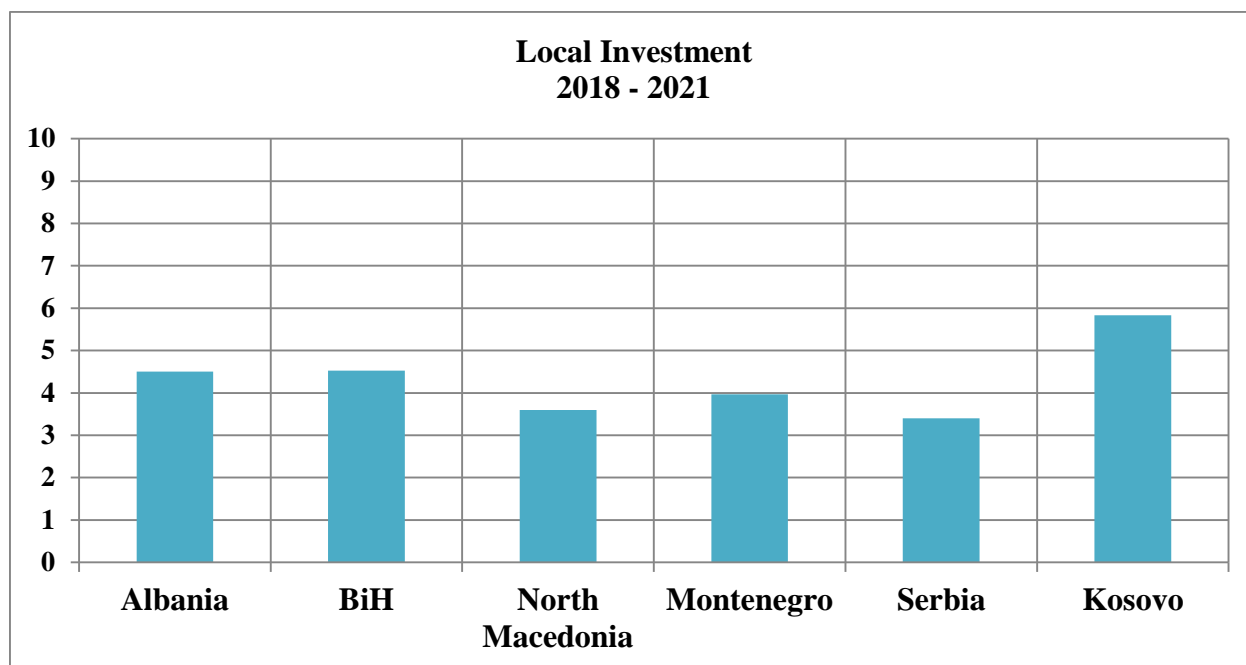
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The question used in the survey to evaluate Willingness to Pay Taxes is `Will the people accept taxes and contributions to finance public goods? The average scores of the answers to this question are below 5 for all Western Balkan Countries between 2018 and 2021, with the exception of Kosovo, as it can be observed in the chart 13 above. The average score for Bosnia and Herzegovina is also higher and closer to 5 than the averages of other countries. When we look at the yearly distribution of the averages for Willingness to Pay Taxes for the Western Balkan Countries, we observe that it was higher in all but Albania in 2020, in comparison to the previous and following years, and the highest in Kosovo, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The comparison of the average results for Willingness to Pay Taxes with those for Austerity Measures shows that the willingness to pay taxes is higher than the willingness to take austerity measures even during the high times of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the average results for the willingness to pay taxes is still lower than those for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality, as it is the case for austerity measures as shared above. Both of these findings support the suggestion shared above regarding the discrepancy between the willingness to invest in public goods and interpersonal relations. Among 129 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 1.1 point increase in comparison to 2018, appears in the third place in the ranking of `countries that have improved their willingness to pay taxes in 2020` (BICE 2020: 5).



**Chart 14:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Willingness to Pay Taxes from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

**Local investment**



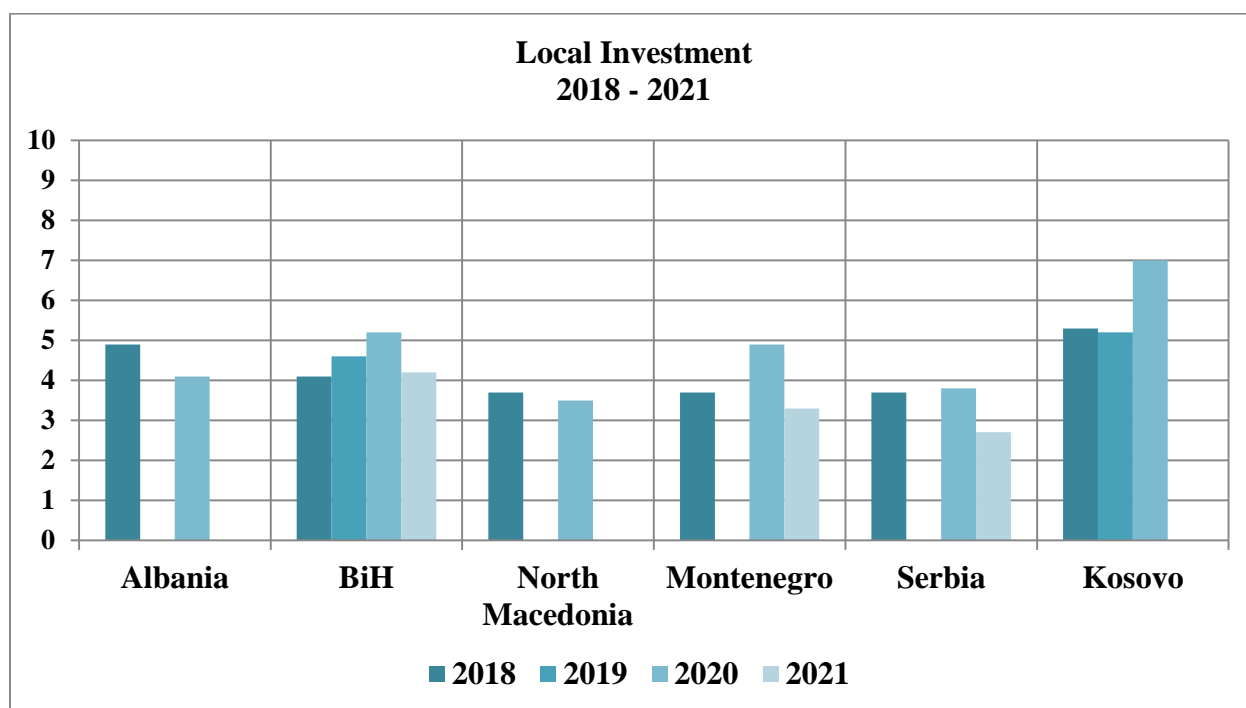
**Chart 15:** Averages for Local Investment from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

The question used in the survey to evaluate Local Investment is 'Are people willing to invest in national and regional assets?'. The average scores of the answers to this question are below 5 for all Western Balkan Countries between 2018 and 2021, again with the exception of Kosovo, as it was the case with the average scores for Willingness to Pay Taxes (Chart 15). Bosnia and Herzegovina is still the country to follow Kosovo with an average score slightly above 4. When we look at the yearly distribution of the averages for Local Investment for the Western Balkan Countries, we observe that it was the highest in Kosovo (7/10) followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in 2020, in comparison to the previous and following years. The comparison of the average results for Local Investment with those for Willingness to Pay Taxes and Austerity Measures shows that the willingness to invest locally is higher than the willingness to pay taxes and to take austerity measures even during the high times of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the results for the willingness to invest locally are still lower than those for social



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climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality in average. Hence, the average results for local investment also support the discrepancy between the willingness to invest in public goods and interpersonal relations. Among 129 countries featured by Increasing Social Goods under Corona, The World Social Capital Monitor 2020, Kosovo appears in the first place with 1.8 point increase in comparison to 2019 and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 1.1 point increase in comparison to 2018 in the seventh place within the top 10` countries that have improved their willingness to invest in savings in local [small-to-medium enterprises] SMEs in 2020` (BICE 2020: 6).



**Chart 16:** Yearly distribution of the averages for Local Investment from Albania (Tirana), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), North Macedonia (Skopje), Montenegro (Podgorica), Serbia (Belgrade) and Kosovo (Pristina) for the period 2018 and 2021.

### CONCLUSION

A general tendency commonly observed for the Western Balkan Countries involved in this analysis is that the scores for social climate, helpfulness, friendliness and hospitality appear higher than 5 and the scores for interpersonal trust, austerity measures, willingness to pay taxes and to invest locally appear below 5. Hence, willingness to invest in public goods falls behind the willingness to invest in interpersonal relations in the Western Balkans. Another tendency observed is the increase in the investment to social goods during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Western

Balkans. This increase appears at its highest level in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the highest number of social goods as explained above and is followed by Kosovo, Serbia and Albania regarding certain social goods in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic seems to contribute to acceleration of shared social goods and virtues.

The weak governments in the region, the high percentage of people (especially youth) leaving their countries and the missing instruments from the European Union leads to the necessity to create a cross-national social network. As both the social and the economic crises in the Western Balkans cannot be resolved at national level, the World Social Capital Monitor offers a Western Balkans Confederation as a solution based on the common background and social goods shared among the Western Balkan Countries. A cross-national Western Balkans Neighborhood SME Fund with a size of € 2 billion to create local economic exchange with a high regional value add (Dill 2020).

The aforementioned change of the title for the region from the World Social Capital Monitor to the Western Balkans Social Goods Monitor is expected to attract more attention and hence, more respondents to the survey. Last but not the least; in order to deflect the focus from the capital cities and diminish their dominant role in regard to the country average, all Western Balkan Countries are invited to participate in the 2022 Western Balkans Social Goods Monitor to be conducted by towns and villages. Participation from settlements outside the capital cities is expected to provide a better representation of the social goods at country level in the Western Balkans, in particular and in the world, in general.

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