

Review of Cases of Femicide in the Western Balkans Region 2020 Baseline Report

Prepared by

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i. Context

During 2020, a regional network for addressing violence against women that involves the Autonomous Women's Center from Serbia, Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) and Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) from Albania, Kosovo Women's Network, National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence from North Macedonia, Center for Women's Rights from Montenegro, and Foundation United Women from Bosnia and Herzegovina took the initiative to collect data and analyze cases of femicide in the Western Balkans region through monitoring media reporting and follow up communication with public institutions that are subjects of protection from violence. In case of Albania, the data on cases of femicide were collected by contributing women's civil society organizations through communication with the General Directorate of State Police of Albania. The objective of the joint regional initiative is to present available data on cases of extreme violence against women and use it as a tool to raise public awareness on the issue, but also to advocate for stronger response of national authorities, public institutions, and the international organizations involved in prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence toward recognizing and addressing murders of women as grave violation of women's human rights and gender based violence.

Common characteristics for all countries in the Western Balkan region are that public institutions which are recognized as subjects of protection from violence do not collect harmonized statistics on all forms of violence against women, including gender-based murders of women and girls. The criminal justice response to the gender-based murder of a woman (femicide) worldwide differs depending on the country of jurisdiction, but countries can be classified into three groups: the first, in which the largest number of countries (including the Republic of Serbia) are included¹, do not recognize femicide as a distinct criminal offense (it is not considered necessary to single out victims by sex and incriminate the murder of a woman as a special form of murder); the second, in which gender-based murder and gender motivation are taken into account as an aggravating circumstance when sentencing; and the third, in which femicide is defined as a distinct criminal offense. It is necessary to examine which model of processing cases would be the most adequate and efficient in sanctioning cases of femicide.

These challenges indicate that femicide remains out of focus in targeted actions aimed to prevent and combat violence against women conducted at the institutional level. This is why it is of key importance to use available data from media reports to raise awareness about murders of women and its specifics and use it to advocate for improved institutional response on femicide at national and regional level.

This baseline report has been prepared based on data collected during 2020 using a joint methodology in all targeted countries, which was developed by the Autonomous Women's Centre, based on long-term experience in monitoring cases of femicide in Serbia. It is prepared based on collaboration of the contributing organizations within the three-year regional project *"Institutionalizing Quality*

¹More on regulation in Serbia in 2021 UNDP Analysis of Cases of Femicide Committed with firearms (June 2017 – June 2020), pages 19-20, available at: https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/analiza-slucajeva-femicida-vatrenim-oruzjem.html

Rehabilitation and Integration Services for Violence Survivors”, supported by the Austrian Development Agency.

ii. Methodology and Specifics of Data Collection

Partner organizations collected data on fifty-five (55) cases of femicide in the Western Balkan region during 2020 – twenty-six (26) cases in Serbia, nine (9) cases in Albania, seven (7) cases in Kosovo, seven (7) cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina, four (4) cases in North Macedonia, and two (2) cases in Montenegro. There is probability that number of murders of women is higher, because not all cases of femicide are covered by media. However, media reporting represents important source of information on murders of women, as all countries in the Western Balkan region have limited and incomplete official statistics on all forms of violence against women. Due to that, femicide remains unrecognized and rarely linked to various patterns of violence that women victims of femicide endured prior to being murdered by the perpetrators of femicide. Presented data should be also observed in the light of COVID – 19 pandemic outbreak at the beginning of 2020, increased security risks for women being closed in homes, with limited possibilities to seek for assistance and support, as well as limited possibilities for media to access and collect all relevant information related to cases of femicide.

The analysis of collected data per countries is focusing on following specific characteristics of femicide cases: *geographical location of a murder* (including village/town), *age of a victim and a perpetrator*, *number of children and number of underage children of a victim*, *relation between a victim and a perpetrator* (partner, former partner, husband, former husband, son, brother, father, grandson, other), *weapon used by a perpetrator and circumstances of death* (firearms, hunting rifle, strangulation, knife, beating, ax, other), *when the murder was committed by firearms, if the perpetrator was legally or illegally possessing it*, *previous reports of violence to the public institutions, and if previously reported, identifying which institutions was it reported to* (center for social work, police, prosecutors, healthcare institution, educational institution, several institutions, other), *did a victim and a perpetrator were living together*, *femicides by location of murder* (house/apartment of a victim, house/apartment of a perpetrator, their common house/apartment, other), *if a perpetrator attempted or committed suicide following the murder, and other circumstances and details relevant for the cases* (history of criminal behavior, transgenerational transfer of violence, participation in war and PTSD, reported for violence against former wife, a victim left perpetrator few days or months before murder, etc.)

iii. Common Characteristics/Patterns of Femicide in the Western Balkans Region

Although it was challenging for contributing organizations to gather detailed information from media reports on cases of murders of women, available data enable mapping of some of the key common characteristics of cases of femicide in the Western Balkan region, as follows:

- ***Every second woman was killed by her husband or partner*** in their common house/apartment, which indicates that women are in the greatest risk of aggravated violence and becoming victims of murder in their closest family settings or in intimate relationships.

- **Women of all age groups are in risk of being victims of femicide, with increased occurrence in a particular age group** – collected data from media reports and police in the countries in the Western Balkans region indicate that women in 46-55 age group are predominant victims. The youngest identified woman victim was nineteen (19) years old, and the oldest woman victim was eighty-five (85) years old.
- **65% of cases of femicide occurred in urban areas while 35% occurred in rural or suburban areas**, which indicate that urban settings pose greater risks for women to be exposed to grave forms of violence, including murder, despite availability of subjects of protection (police, centers for social work, health centers, prosecutor’s offices, courts, etc.).
- **Only in relation to eleven (11) cases of murders of women (20%), media reports in Western Balkans region clearly indicate that women reported violence, usually repeatedly, namely to the police or the centers for social work and prosecutor’s offices. In 60% of cases of murders of women, violence was not previously reported to the public institutions** (police, centers for social work, prosecutor’s offices, etc.) This should be observed together with the data on high prevalence of murders of women in urban areas, and indicates lack of information on available services of support and assistance, lack of trust by women victims that public institutions can protect them from violence, prevent its repetition, or escalation to more grave forms, as well as lack of institutional response to prevent violence against women, especially risk assessment and usage and monitoring of protective measures (e.g. restraining orders) aimed for prevent repetition and escalation of violence. It indicates that further actions aimed to prevent femicide need to observe reasons why the public institutions with authorities to work on cases of violence against women cannot recognize women who are at high risk of femicide, having in mind specific circumstances that could indicate that there would be a fatal outcome of violence, and which were not recognized, reported, and recorded.
- **Every third woman victim was murdered with firearms (guns, automatic rifles, explosive devices)** – in majority of cases, media reports indicate that firearms were in illegal possession of the perpetrator, or this fact was not given focus. In two (2) cases (identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro), women victims were murdered by the perpetrators who legally possessed firearms based on their profession (a security guard, a police officer). Legislation in Serbia stipulates that during each report of domestic violence, the police check whether the suspect has a weapon and temporarily confiscate his weapon. This data should also be observed considering recent history of conflicts in the region, as well as the fact that weapons can be easily and cheaply procured. Better control of the possession of weapons in legal possession is needed. Recent research shows that weapons left over from the war have been distributed among private homes and used for violence against women in Serbia, and that war participants are more willing to commit violence against women.² In North Macedonia, research indicate that small arms and light weapons were wide available in the country, and a particularly high

² 2019 OSCE Led Survey on Violence Against Women “Well-Being and Safety of Women”, Serbia Results Report, pages 15-17, available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/4/419750_1.pdf

proportion of female victims of firearm offences compared to elsewhere in South-eastern Europe.³ In Kosovo, researches indicate links between firearms and domestic violence and using firearms to exert overall control over women, which seriously affects their safety.⁴ In Albania, research suggest that consequences of political crisis in 1997 led to re-emergence of traditional values, and that weapons that remained in circulation increased rates of gun related crimes, including violence against women.⁵ The research on use of a small weapons in Bosnia and Herzegovina points at direct link between possession of a weapon and domestic violence, with the data that 42,5% of all murders in a family were committed with use of weapon, and that 50% of all cases of domestic violence that include use of weapon resulted in a fatal outcome.⁶ In Montenegro, researches indicate relationship between violence against women and availability of firearms that are predominantly owned by men – data collected by women’s CSOs in the country indicate a number of cases where women were threatened with a weapon by their partners, and women survivors of violence witnessing that the perpetrators tried to kill them.⁷

- ***Men of all age groups are identified as the perpetrators of murders of women, with increased occurrence in particular age group*** – media and police reports indicate that men in age group 46 – 55 are predominant perpetrators of murders of women, with the youngest perpetrator identified as seventeen (17) years old and the oldest perpetrator identified as eighty-five (85) years old. By available data, ***every third perpetrator committed or attempted suicide after murdering a woman victim***, with the highest prevalence of suicide/attempted suicide of the perpetrators identified in Serbia – with every second perpetrator committing or attempting suicide.
- ***Observed available circumstances that led to cases of murders of women in all countries in the region indicate greater risk of femicide in cases when women victims left their husbands/partners*** and necessity of stronger actions of public institutions in terms of ensuring risk assessments as well protection and care for women who leave their violent husbands or partners, or are exposed to continuous stalking, spying, harassment, threats, or other forms of violence, especially in cases when violence was repeatedly reported by victims of persons in their close environment.

³ 2019 OSCE Led Survey on Violence Against Women “Well-being and Safety of Women”, North Macedonia Results Report, page 15, available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/5/419264_1.pdf

⁴ 2019 OSCE Led Survey on Violence Against Women “Well-Being and Safety of Women”, Kosovo Results Report, pages 28-29, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/c/439781.pdf>

⁵ 2019 OSCE Led Survey on Violence Against Women “Well-being and Safety of Women”, Albania Results Report, page 15, available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/8/434849_1.pdf

⁶ “Gender and Small Arms in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the joint initiative of the UNDP and the Regional Cooperation Council, 2019, dostupno na: http://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-SALW/Gender-And-Small-Arms_BiH_ENG_WEB.pdf

⁷ 2019 OSCE Led Survey on Violence Against Women “Well-Being and Safety of Women”, Montenegro Results Report, page 17, available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/7/424985_1.pdf

iv. Review of Collected Data on Cases of Femicide on Country Level

a). Serbia

Based on data collected through monitoring of media reporting, Autonomous Women's Center from Serbia collected data on twenty-six (26) cases of femicide in Serbia during 2020. Average age of women victims is fifty-six (56) years old – the youngest woman victim was nineteen (19) years old, while the oldest woman victim was eighty-five (85) years old. Thirty – six (36) children lost their mothers, out of which eleven (11) children are minors. Seventeen (17) murders of women occurred in urban area, while eight (8) murders of women occurred in rural area. One (1) murder of woman victim occurred on the road between two cities. In terms of relationship between a woman victim and a perpetrator, eight (8) women were murdered by their husbands and eight (8) women were murdered by their partners. Two (2) women were murdered by their ex-partners, two (2) women were murdered by their sons, and two (2) women were murdered by their stepsons, while one (1) woman was murdered by her brother, one (1) woman was murdered by her brother-in-law, and one (1) woman was murdered by her neighbor - a perpetrator and a woman victim had very close mother – son like relationship. Additionally, media reports indicate that the perpetrator had raped the woman victim prior murdering her.

Data collected through media reports indicate that there were twenty-six (26) perpetrators of femicide – average age of perpetrators is fifty – three (53) years of age, with the youngest perpetrator being twenty (20) years old, and the oldest perpetrator being eighty-five (85) years old. Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death were, as follows: eight (8) women victims were murdered by firearms/explosive devices, out of which six (6) women victims were murdered with a gun, one (1) woman was murdered with automatic rifle, and one (1) woman was murdered with a bomb activated by the perpetrator. In these cases, media reporting indicates that in three (3) cases of femicide, firearms were in legal possession of a relative of the perpetrator, while in one (1) case was legally possessed by the perpetrator. In two (2) cases, firearms were illegally possessed by the perpetrators, while in two (2) cases of murders of women it was unknown if the perpetrators legally or illegally possessed firearms.

Seven (7) women were murdered with a knife, and five (5) women were murdered with an ax. Three (3) woman victims were beaten to death, and one (1) woman victim was strangled, one (1) woman victim was murdered with blunt object, and one (1) woman victim was poured with gasoline and ignited by the perpetrator. In one (1) case of femicide, media reports indicate that, prior to the murder of a woman victim, a perpetrator which was her partner was serving prison sentence for murdering his former wife. He killed his partner six months after he was released from prison three and a half years earlier for good behavior.

Out of twenty-six (26) cases of murders of women, only in four (4) cases there are information that the violence was previously reported to the public institutions, namely to the police and centers for social work. In one (1) case of femicide, media reports indicate that previous violence was also reported to the prosecutor's office. Upon committing murders of women victims, eleven (11) perpetrators committed suicide, two (2) perpetrators attempted suicide, while thirteen (13) perpetrators did not commit or attempt suicide.

The data gathered by Autonomous Women's Center through media reporting indicate that in seventeen (17) cases of femicide, women victims and perpetrators were living together prior to the murder, while in nine (9) cases they did not share common household. Fifteen (15) murders of women were committed by the perpetrators in their common house/apartment, four (4) murders occurred in the house/apartment of the women victims, while one (1) murder of woman victim occurred in the house/apartment of the perpetrator. One (1) woman victim was killed by a bomb activated by her partner on a road between two cities. One (1) woman victim was murdered by her husband at her workplace (the perpetrator also murdered two of her co-workers). One (1) woman victim was murdered at the street by her ex-partner (the perpetrator also murdered her husband). One (1) woman was murdered in her car by her partner (media report indicate the perpetrator committed suicide).

b). Albania

Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) and Albanian Women Empowerment Network from Albania collected data from the General Directorate of State Police on nine (9) cases of femicide in Albania during 2020. Average age of women victims is forty-six (46) years old – the youngest woman victim was thirty (30) years old, while the oldest woman victim was seventy (70) years old. Information on number and age of children of women victims were not available. Five (5) murders of women occurred in urban/city area, three (3) murders occurred in rural area, and one (1) murder occurred in suburban area. Three (3) women victims were murdered by their husbands, two (2) women were murdered with their brother-in-law, one (1) woman victim was murdered by her son, while two (2) women victims were murdered by other persons, and their relationship to women victims remained unknown.

Data gathered from the police indicate that there were eleven (11) identified perpetrators of murders of women – average age of perpetrators is forty (40) years of age, with the youngest perpetrator being seventeen (17) years old, and the oldest perpetrator being sixty-three (63) years old. Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death of women victims were, as follows: four (4) women victims were murdered by firearms, which were in illegal possession of the perpetrators of femicide. Two (2) women victims were murdered with a knife, one (1) woman victim was murdered by strangulation, one (1) woman victim was murdered by cutting and strikes with solid objects, and one (1) woman victim was murdered with strikes with an iron lever. In relation to five (5) cases of femicide, violence was previously reported to the police, while in four (4) cases, violence has not been previously reported to the police. Collected data indicate that there were no perpetrators that attempted or committed suicide after murdering women victims.

The data gathered from the General Directorate of State Police in Albania indicate that in five (5) cases, a woman victim and a perpetrator were not living together, and out of these cases, four (4) women victims were murdered in their own house, while one (1) woman was murdered on the street. In four (4) cases women victims and the perpetrators lived together, and two (2) women victims were murdered in their common house, one (1) woman victim was murdered in the family shop, and one (1) woman victim was murdered in the backyard.

c). Kosovo

There were seven (7) cases of femicide reported by media in Kosovo in 2020 based on data collected by the Kosovo Women's Network. Data in media reports are scarce, and due to that it was not possible to identify and analyze all details on murders of women, based on the common methodology used for observed countries. Five (5) cases of femicide occurred in urban area, while two (2) cases occurred in rural area.

In relation to two (2) cases of murders of women for which the more data is available, KWN identified that one (1) minor child lost mother, while two (2) adult children of a woman victim were also murdered by their father, which was identified as the perpetrator. Both women victims were murdered by their husbands. Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death of women victims in these two cases of femicide were, as follows: one (1) woman victim and her two (2) adult sons were murdered with firearms, for which it is unknown if it was in legal or illegal possession of the perpetrator. It is unknown if the violence has been reported to the public institutions prior to the period that murders occurred. A woman victim and a perpetrator were living together, and a perpetrator committed suicide after he murdered his wife and two (2) sons. One (1) woman victim was murdered with knife by her husband which was identified as the perpetrator. Media reports indicate that the violence has been previously reported to the police by the woman victim. The perpetrator murdered her upon his release from prison.

d). Bosnia and Herzegovina

Based on data collected by the Foundation United Women, BiH through media reporting in 2020 on seven (7) cases of femicide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, average age of women victims is fifty-six (56) years of age – the youngest victim was thirty-three (33) years old, while the oldest victim was seventy-nine (79) years old. Based on available data, five (5) children lost their mothers, out of which one (1) minor child, while in four (4) cases it is unknown if a woman victim had children or not.

Five (5) murders of women occurred in urban areas, while two (2) murders occurred in rural areas (village). Two (2) women were murdered by their husbands, one (1) woman was murdered by her former husband, one (1) woman was murdered by her intimate partner, one (1) woman was murdered by her ex intimate partner, one (1) woman was murdered by her close relative (nephew), and one (1) woman was murdered by her former working colleague. Average age of the perpetrators of femicide is fifty (50) years of age – with the youngest perpetrator being forty-one (41) years old, and the oldest perpetrator being sixty-four (64) years old. Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death of women victims were, as follows: one (1) woman was poured with gasoline and ignited (she died in a hospital soon after), and three (3) women victims were shot with a firearm (gun), among which one (1) woman victim was severely injured and died in a hospital ten days after the shooting. One (1) woman victim was murdered with a knife, and one (1) woman was beaten and then murdered with a knife. In two (2) cases in which women victims were murdered by use of firearms, it is unknown if the perpetrators had a license or illegally possessed it, while in one (1) case, the perpetrator used his official gun, as he was working as a security officer.

In four (4) cases, media reported that a victim and a perpetrator were living together, while in three (3) cases there was no common life between a victim and a perpetrator. In one (1) case the perpetrator committed a suicide after murdering a woman victim, in one (1) case the perpetrator attempted suicide, while in five (5) cases the perpetrator did not committed/attempted suicide.

In three (3) cases, media reported that violence was not previously reported to the institutions, while in three (3) cases it is unknown if a victim or other person previously reported violence to the institutions. Only in one (1) case of femicide, persistent stalking, harassment, and threats of the perpetrator against a woman victim over longer period were repeatedly reported to police. In two (2) of the cases for which was unknown if the violence was previously reported to institutions, data collected through media indicate that victims suffered long term violence prior to murder.

In terms of circumstances related to previous violence and/or criminal behavior of the perpetrators reported by media, in one case media reported that the perpetrator was repeating violence continuously over 10 years, and that a woman victim left the perpetrator eight (8) years ago, and under threats returned after he set on fire her mother's house and continued to live with a perpetrator in common law marriage. In the second case, a woman victim recently left the perpetrator, and he was pressuring her to reconcile. In the third reported case, the perpetrator had an argument with a victim prior to a murder, and alleged motive was jealousy. In the fourth case, a woman victim objected to the perpetrator for drunkenness - he beat her to death and stabbed her in a rage. In the fifth case, a woman victim suffered long-term physical and psychological abuse by the perpetrator, he was an alcoholic, and he murdered her in an act of rage. In the sixth case of femicide, a woman victim was previously receiving continuous threats, and was subjected to harassment, stalking, and spying by the perpetrator, which was her working colleague, and she was reporting him repeatedly to the police prior to the murder. Circumstances of one (1) reported case are unknown, with no sufficient information in media reports.

e). North Macedonia

National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence from North Macedonia collected data from media on four (4) cases of murders of women in North Macedonia during 2020. Based on collected data, average age of women victims is forty-six (46) years of age (36, 41, 60, one victim of unknown age). Data on children of victims who lost their mothers are unknown. Three (3) murders occurred in urban area while one (1) murder occurred in suburban area of Skopje (capital of NM). Three (3) women were murdered by their husbands, while one (1) woman was murdered by her partner. Average age of the perpetrator was forty-six (46) years of age (27, 40, 50, 67). Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death of women victims were, as follows: two (2) women were murdered with firearms (gun), one (1) woman was murdered by beating, while one (1) woman was murdered by knife and ax. In two (2) cases in which women victims were murdered by use of firearms, one (1) perpetrator illegally possessed it, while in other case it was unknown if the weapons were in legal or illegal possession of the perpetrator.

Media reporting indicate that only in relation to one (1) case of femicide, violence has been previously reported to the police. In two (2) cases, violence has not been previously reported to the institutions, while in one (1) case, it is unknown if it was reported or not. In all four (4) cases of femicide, reports show that the victims and the perpetrators were living together. In three (3) cases femicide occurred in the shared home of the victims and the perpetrators, while in one (1) case, it occurred on unknown location. In all four (4) cases, the perpetrators did not attempted/committed suicide following the murders of women victims.

f). Montenegro

Center for Women's Rights from Montenegro collected information on two (2) cases of femicide that occurred in Montenegro during 2020. Based on media reports, women victims were thirty-nine (39) and fifty-four (54) years old. One (1) murder occurred in urban area, while one (1) occurred in rural area. Five (5) children lost their mothers, out of which two (2) children were minors. Three (3) children, including both minors have witnessed the murder of their mother.

One (1) murder was committed by two (2) perpetrators – forty-seven (47) and thirty-six (36) years of age, out of which one (1) perpetrator was a partner of a woman victim, and another was his accomplice, with unknown relationship with a victim. Second murder was committed by forty-seven (47) years old man, a husband of a woman victim. Weapons used by the perpetrators/circumstances of death of women victims were, as follows: one (1) woman was beaten to death by fists and blunt object, and her corpse was burned by the perpetrators. The perpetrators took a woman victim to an isolated place (by the road). A woman victim and the perpetrator (partner) did not live together. In the second case of femicide, a woman victim was murdered with firearms (gun) by her husband, a police officer who legally possessed it based on his profession. The second murder occurred in the home of a woman victim and a perpetrator, in which they lived together. In both cases of femicide, the media reports do not indicate if the violence has been previously reported to the institutions.

Based on media reporting on these two (2) cases, the perpetrators did not attempted/committed suicide following the murders they committed.