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PROMOTING COOPERATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corruption is one of the most encountered and heard phenomenon, which can be considered a common feature of the countries of Eastern Europe and especially the Western Balkans. Numerous local and international studies have been conducted on this aspect of governance trying to shed light on its darkest corners, but the struggle continues. This report aims to study corruption at the local level with the aim of identifying the specific problems that the citizens of the three secondary cities of Albania, Kosovo and Serbia encounter in their daily lives and on this basis the formulation of some recommendations and the extraction of best practices of one country against another.

For the implementation of this project, the selected cities are the city of Durrës in Albania, Smederevo in Serbia and Lipjan in Kosovo. The data collected through polling in these cities were analyzed in two aspects: (a) corruption and (b) good governance following the same methodology simultaneously in all three cities. A summary of the main findings of the report is found in the following lines:

• **Corruption in regression**

Corruption is considered a serious and very serious problem by more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents in each of the countries (80.4% in Albania, 74.6% in Kosovo and 79.4% in Serbia) and its progress over the last 10 years it is considered worse and much worse by 71.7% of respondents in Albania and 57.9% in Serbia.

• **Lack of political will to fight corruption by the governments of the countries**

The political will to fight corruption from the governments of the countries where the study was conducted is perceived in very low numbers (72% of respondents in Albania do not trust the political will of the government, 66% in Albania and 36% in Kosovo).

• **Obligation to pay bribes to obtain basic services**

Almost half of the respondents in Albania and Serbia state that they have had to pay bribes to get basic services, permits or licenses, to speed up court processes or to review taxes. In Kosovo, this phenomenon is encountered less often and the respondents chose not to answer in most cases.

• **Corrupt health system**

A part of the respondents are referred to private clinics by doctors of state hospitals where they approach to benefit from the necessary service and in these cases the referral is more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the respondents (77.3% in Albania, 70% in Kosovo and 50.5% in Serbia) confirm that they met the same personnel in the private clinic where they were referred.

• **Lack of information on the procedures for reporting corrupt acts**

The vast majority of respondents in the three cities do not know what process should be followed to report a corrupt act (69.8% in Serbia, 69.7% in Albania and 19% in Kosovo).

• **Inefficient, complicated reporting system that does not offer protection against possible retaliation**

More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the respondents in each of the countries evaluate the corruption reporting system as ineffective, complicated and feel vulnerable against possible reprisals that may come as a result of reporting. Respondents in Kosovo mostly choose to remain indifferent or not to answer questions of this type.

• **The main reasons for not reporting corruption cases**

The main reasons why citizens choose not to report corruption cases are:

- It is difficult to prove/provide evidence that the case really happened;
- There is no effort to improve even in cases where decisions are made;
- Concerns that come as a result of fear of possible reprisals;

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of one of three surveys conducted as part of the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) project “Promoting Cooperation Between Civil Society Actors in the Fight Against Corruption,” which aims to strengthen local capacities in support of civic awareness in the fight against corruption. The project focuses on three countries of the Western Balkans and is implemented respectively by [Albanian Center for Economic Research](#) in Albania, [Anti-Corruption Research Institute](#) in Serbia and The Organization “[ÇOHU](#)” in Kosovo.

ACER and ÇOHU are civil society organizations that are members of the network [SELDI](#) (Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity)¹ project which was created more than a decade ago and is focused on the field of anti-corruption and good governance, currently consisting of 39 members and collaborators. The experience of SELDI has helped the two partner organizations in adapting the methodology of this project, namely the methodology for monitoring corruption CMS (Corruption Monitoring System)².

In general, the countries of the Western Balkans that come from a common communist past, suffer the presence and consequences of the phenomenon of corruption. According to Transparency International (TI), corruption in the three analyzed countries continues to be a serious problem. If we look at the annual corruption index for the three countries included in the WBF-supported project, it is noted that, in the period 2018 - 2022, it is found that the corruption perception index varies from (35) to (38) on a scale of 0 out of 100 where 100 is very clean and 0 is very corrupt, this means that all three countries are ranked low compared to the rest of the world³.

Reducing corruption and improving governance on this basis is one of the prerequisites for economic and social progress and membership in the European Union, therefore the governments of the respective countries make efforts for a successful fight against corruption, which is estimated to be present in all areas of life. In the progress of the annual reports of the European Union, corruption continues to remain a main obstacle for the further integration of the countries analyzed.

Through the implementation of this project, it is intended that based on the perception of citizens in the respective municipalities, the general views and perspectives on corruption and its impact on the quality of public services provided will be presented. The conclusions reached from the anti-corruption survey undertaken through this project, it is estimated that can be used to initiate, evaluate and undertake the necessary reforms that support good local governance and that are applicable in each country.

¹ SELDI is the largest civil society network for anti-corruption and good governance in Southeast Europe. At its beginning it gathered 17 partners from 9 countries of South-Eastern Europe (currently 39 members and collaborators). SELDI has a decentralized management structure and currently the coordination of the network is entrusted to the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC).

² https://acer.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ACER_SELDI_ENG_CMS-2021-FINAL.pdf

³ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>

METHODOLOGY

The survey follows a three-step approach:- first, potential cities were identified where the survey would take place. The grouping and selection was made on the basis of indicators such as compliance with the project objectives, that is, medium-sized cities were chosen (not the capitals of the countries participating in the project), cities located not far from the capital, with similar population and indicators with the capital, presence identifiable through mass-media denunciations regarding corruption at the local level, etc. The selected cities, based on these criteria, are respectively: Durrës (Albania), Smederevo (Serbia) and Lipjan (Kosovo).

Then, based on the availability of detailed demographic data of each of the selected cities where the project will be implemented, the draft questionnaire that was used for the survey was built and tested. After that, the survey was carried out simultaneously in the three countries (cities) participating in the project. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing)⁴ method and questionnaires were recorded in the ACER data transmission system.

The questionnaire was built on the basis of a well-known applied methodology from a similar study supported by the Council of Europe.⁵ As the focus of the current project is on corruption at the local level, ACER together with the project partners made some modifications to the content of the survey, keeping the main parts related to anti-corruption, but changing some of the answer options related to with the specifics of participating countries⁶. The sample used includes the adult resident population of the respective municipalities living in both rural and urban areas.

At the end of the survey, the results of the interviews and the findings of the study were analyzed through the SPSS program to provide a detailed overview of the corruption situation at the local level, as well as the activities and political recommendations that citizens think should be undertaken by local government in each country participating in the project.

TRAINING AND FIELD WORK

Among the first activities of the project was the training of representatives of partner organizations implementing the project, developed in Pristina. The training consisted of clarifying the project methodology so that the three partner organizations could provide comparable data between them. After the clarification of the methodology and the selection of the questionnaire, each of the partners has selected the individuals who would be engaged in completing the questionnaires in the respective areas, in order to carry out the defined number of interviews (450 interviews in each country). In order for the interviewers to acquire the questionnaire and understand the methodology of the project, the partners have developed a special training for them explaining in detail each section of the questionnaire as well as the technique of addressing the questions and documenting the answers through tablet PC for transmission on the system of ACER. The method chosen to obtain a random sample is that of the “seventh door”. According to this method, after fixing the boundaries of the group, the interviewers choose a random location from which to start the interview and then proceed systematically from there. After a door (house/apartment) is selected randomly, the interviewers select the next door using this method. So, after the house that will hold the number 1 is decided in advance, the next house is chosen the one with the number 7 and so on (the difference from one door to the other must be 6). This is done in function of the distribution of the sample which is taken in the interview. Once the family which would be interviewed has been identified, the interviewee in that family must be: over 18 years old and have the nearest birthday. In this way, every interview conducted by the interviewer was automatically uploaded immediately to the dedicated server, located in the premises of ACER. The database was progressively updated on the server and enabled periodic control of the progress of the data collection process.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report, in order to express in a clear and comprehensible form the findings of the three countries analyzed by external readers, has been divided into several sub-topics which are as follows:

The first sub-issue concerns the public perception of corruption in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. This sub-topic includes within it the impact of corruption on the standard of living, the main problems (Durrës, Lipjan, Smederevo) and also poses the question: “Coexistence with corruption or lack of strategies and will to fight it?”. This sub-topic also covers pressure from the administration and the obligation to pay bribes. All these points are looked at in the local context, comparing between the three countries where the project is focused.

The second sub-issue focuses on the public perception on corruption reporting procedures, giving a clear picture of what they think and the knowledge of the respondents on the process of complaining of corrupt acts in the public administration, under the comparison panorama between three cities and countries. This sub-topic further analyzes the reporting rate and the main reasons that influence non-reporting even in cases where there are reasons to do so (such as cases of direct bribery). Another focus of this sub-issue are the main issues regarding basic public services which are a vital need for the citizens of any country.

The third sub-topic reflects the main conclusions and recommendations of the report, focusing on the findings of the three respective countries. This subsection first gives the main findings or conclusions of the report and then continues with the main recommendations of the respondents in each of the respective cities (Durrës, Lipjan and Smederevo).

⁴ According to ACER's agreement with the other two project partners, this technical opportunity was used by them, so the database was centralized in ACER's electronic data transmission system

⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/16806ed5af>

⁶ The project methodology, part of which is the survey questionnaire, has been widely discussed and agreed between the project partners at the Pristina Workshop (1.02.2023)

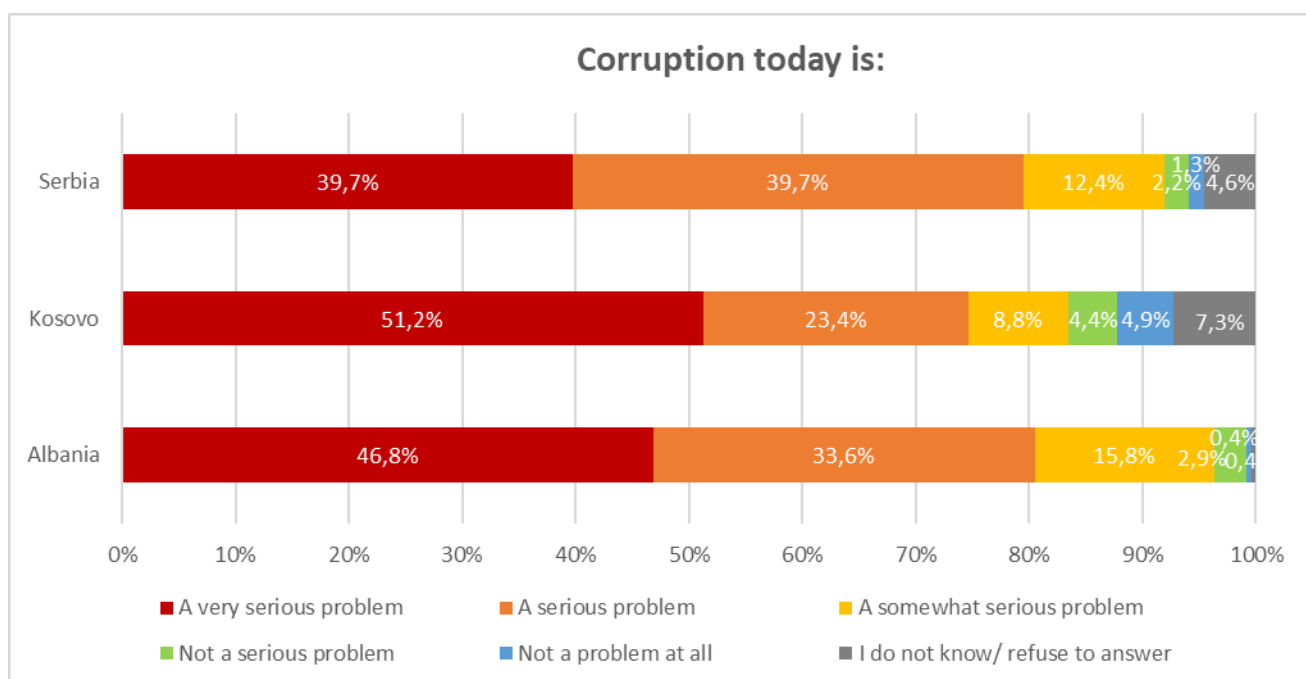
1. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION IN ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND SERBIA

The countries of the Western Balkans are countries that have been characterized by high levels of corruption and its pressure over the years. We can mention the findings of the regional survey based on the Corruption Monitoring system implemented by the SELDI project⁷ with the same methodology since 2002, from which it results that all three countries analyzed have high pressure of corruption. In the findings of the last CMS report (2021), it results that the percentage of possibility for corruption pressure⁸ is respectively 64% for Albania, 63% for Kosovo and 55% for Serbia.⁹ CMS, unlike this study, is nationally extended to respective countries and findings are compared between them.

Despite the wider scope of CMS, the data on the level of corruption from the survey carried out in only one city of each country by the WBF-supported project are close to those of the last SELDI, that is, the perception of citizens on this phenomenon of corruption is similar. As can be understood from Figure 1 below, *the perception of corruption as a serious and very serious problem* is still very high in all three countries, respectively 80.4% in Albania, 74.6% in Kosovo and 79.4% in Serbia. The fact that although Kosovo is the youngest country among the countries included in the analysis, the assessment of the phenomenon of corruption is very close to the other two countries, Albania and Serbia (with a difference of -4.8% with Serbia and - 5.8% with Albania).

In Kosovo, a higher number of people who choose not to answer by selecting the option “I don’t know/refuse to answer” is also observed, at the level of 7.3%. This shows a reluctance to answer, which may come from a lack of information or a reluctance to answer for various reasons, including a reluctance to speak openly about this phenomenon.

Figure 1. Assessment of the perception of present corruption



In the evaluation of the trend of corruption compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 2), the differences between countries seem to be more diverse. In a 4-scale evaluation of the trend of corruption, where 1 - much worse and 4 - much reduced, the greatest progress in the fight against it, it can be fully said that Kosovo has an evaluation of 41.9% for the groups of responses *decreased and decreased a lot*, in contrast to Albania and Serbia that have much lower figures for these options (respectively 3.7% in Albania and 4.2% in Serbia). Kosovo’s data show that it is the general perception of the population that corruption is on the rise, thus increasing public trust in governance and justice.

Meanwhile, the situation is different in the case of Albania, where the perception of corruption has suffered a marked regression with 71.7% of respondents who assess the level of corruption as *worse and much worse* compared to the last 10 years. A similar situation is also observed in Serbia with 57.9% of respondents who assess the trend of corruption as *worse and much worse*, numbers which are again considered high and with a significant difference with Kosovo which has the number 23.9% for this indicator.

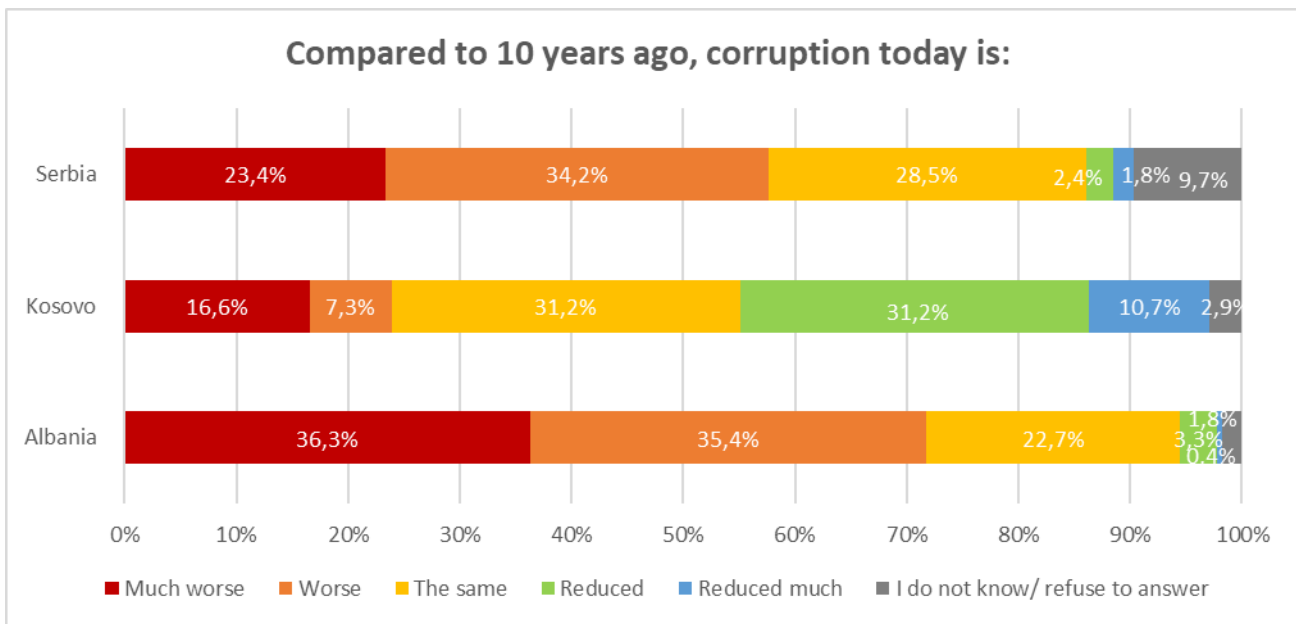
Something else that is noticed is the fact that Albania seems to have marked a low and insignificant progress, remaining in the country-number, with only 22.7% of the respondents who evaluate corruption at the same level as 10 years ago. Unlike Kosovo, which has a figure of 31.2% and Serbia, respectively, 28.5% for the same indicator. The political events of recent years seem to have greatly influenced Serbia and Albania, reducing confidence in the political will to fight corruption, while Kosovo, although the youngest country in the analysis, has marked significant progress in improving citizen perception against the phenomenon of corruption.

⁷ For more about the project, visit: <https://seldi.net>

⁸ “Corruption pressure” reflects instances of initiation of bribe seeking by public officials: either by directly requesting an informal payment or by indirectly indicating that an informal payment would lead to a positive (for the citizen) outcome.

⁹ For more: <https://seldi.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Infografik-01-Insights-from-SELDIs-Corruption-Monitoring-System-2021.pdf>

Figure 2. Assessment of the trend of corruption compared to 10 years ago

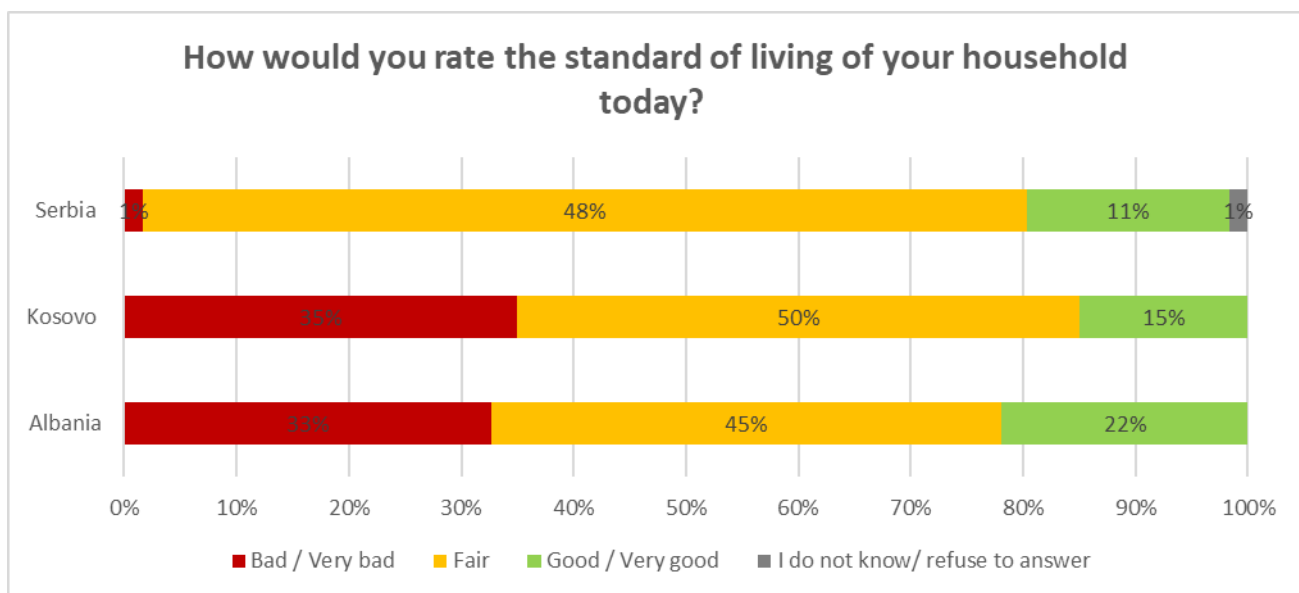


1.1 The impact of corruption on the standard of living, the main problems (Durrës, Lipjan, Smedervo)

Respondents were asked how they assess their current standard of living (Figure 3) and compared to 3 years ago (Figure 4). As for the assessment of the current standard of living, a similar trend is observed for the “almost the same (fair)” option for the three countries, as the highest respective figures are for this choice option (50% in Kosovo, 48% in Serbia and 45% in Albania).

The most positive trend seems to be shown by Serbia, with only 1% of respondents evaluating their current standard of living compared to 3 years ago as *bad/very bad* compared to Kosovo, where 35% of respondents chose it as an option, and Albania (33%). This difference between Serbia and the other two countries shows that the government measures to deal with the crisis, especially regarding employment and social support, have been more effective than the measures taken in the other two countries. Something else worth mentioning is the fact that people’s perception of the standard of living is characterized by a dose of subjectivity because it is conditioned by their cultural level or the socio-economic environment in which they live, therefore differences in opinion are acceptable all the more for analysis comparative from one country to another.

Figure 3. Current standard of living today



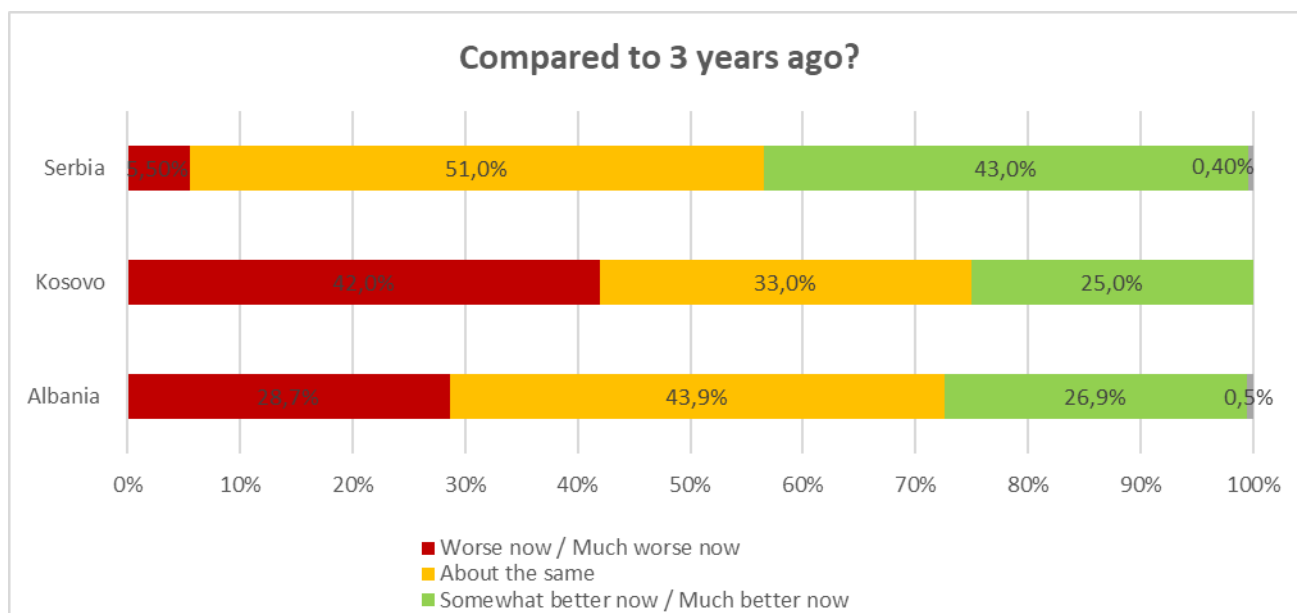
Meanwhile, as regards the comparison of the current standard of living with 3 years ago (Figure 4), it is noted that the specific weight of the respondents is similar in Serbia and Albania as regards the “*about the same*” option, which has the highest frequency of responses, respectively 51% in Serbia and 43.9% in Albania (33% in Kosovo), while Kosovo has the highest frequency for the option *worse now/much worse now*, respectively with a percentage of responses of 42% compared to 28.7% Albania and 5.5% Serbia.

Even in the question about the current standard of living, Kosovo had the highest frequency of respondents who chose *bad/very bad* (35%) and Serbia the lowest number (1%). These differences show a disturbing current economic situation and that the government of Kosovo

has not given due importance to keeping its promises to improve the standard of living of its citizens and that the expectations of citizens are higher than those of neighboring countries with them.

Meanwhile, Serbia seems to have the best performance in this area with 43% of respondents who consider the standard of living *good/very good* than three years ago compared to Albania (26.9%) and Kosovo (25%). The trend seems to be similar both for the current standard of living (Figure 3) and for the comparable one over the years (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Standard of living compared to 3 years ago



Respondents were asked what they consider to be the most serious challenge of their city from a list of problems (Figure 5), from which it can be seen that *corruption and political instability* is one of the main problems found mostly in Serbia (10%) but also in Albania (7%)¹⁰. These data also correspond to the assessment of the last year (2021) of the World Bank for Worldwide Governance Indicators where the countries analyzed have a weak weighting in the areas of political stability and corruption control.¹¹

On the other hand, problems such as the *low quality and high costs health care* are considered disturbing phenomenon for Albania (6%) and Kosovo (5%), while in Serbia only 1% of respondents choose this problem against others. The same situation is encountered with the problem of migration, where in Albania it was chosen as the most serious problem by 6% of the respondents, as well as 6% in Kosovo, while in Serbia it was chosen by only 1% of the respondents. These results seem to come as a result of the relatively higher standard of living of Serbia compared to the other two countries, also reflected in the analysis above, which makes these phenomena not be on the list of the most urgent serious problems for the country.

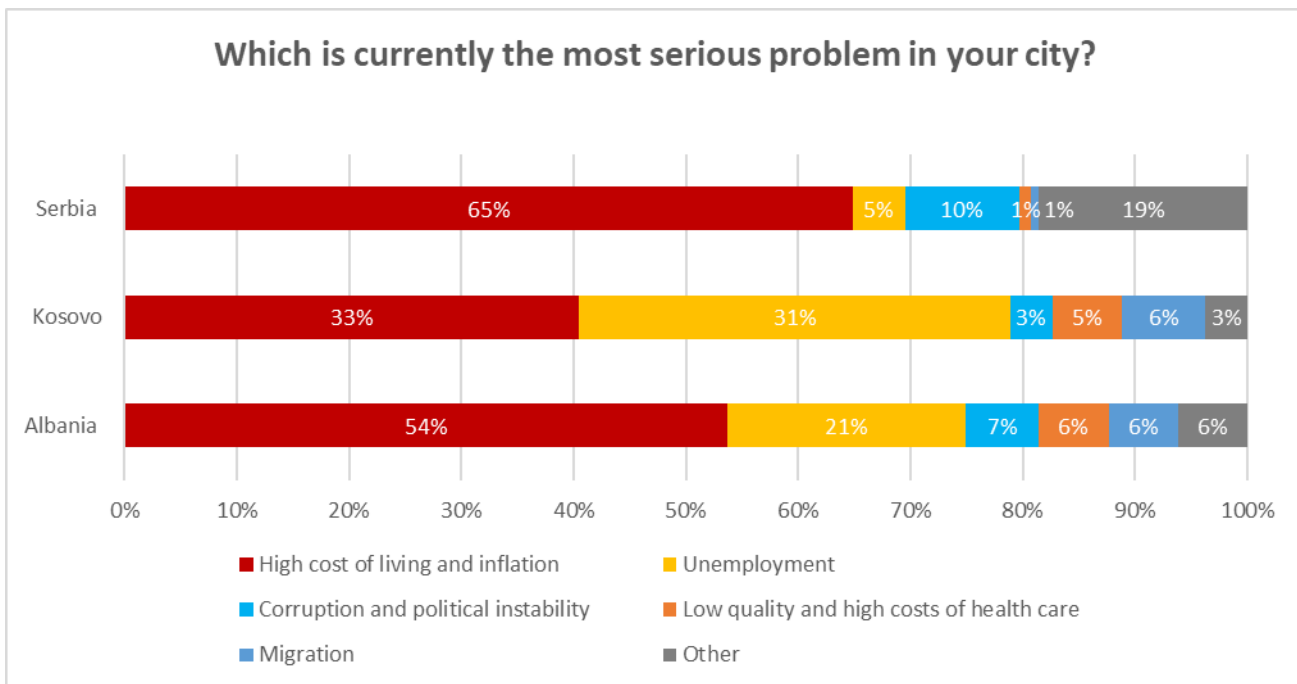
In the case of Albania, these two indicators (*corruption and political instability, low quality and high costs health care*) are in a logical relationship between them: the lower the level of public health service, the more citizens will spend on private hospitals or even abroad to get the service they see fit. The cost of the latter is increased by the existence of public-private partnerships as well as the deficiencies in the health care scheme, in which the employees contribute, but the services that are returned to you are at negligible levels.

In Serbia, it is noted that there is a significant number of respondents who chose the option “Other” (19%) when they were asked to choose the most serious problem of the country, unlike Albania (6%) and Kosovo (3%). It seems that the problems of the society of this country are wider and that the respondents did not find their most disturbing problem in the list provided in the survey questionnaire.

¹⁰ Albania and Kosovo - both are clearly concerned by immigration, which in recent years has reached alarming levels, which affects the reduction of the active workforce, but also the dynamism of democratic processes. Emigration is also considered as a factor with a negative impact on the decline of citizen participation in the elections of May 14, 2023 in Albania.

¹¹ For more information on indicator weighting in the World Bank’s analysis of Global Governance Indicators, visit: <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>

Figure 5. Assessment of the most serious problems in the respective cities.



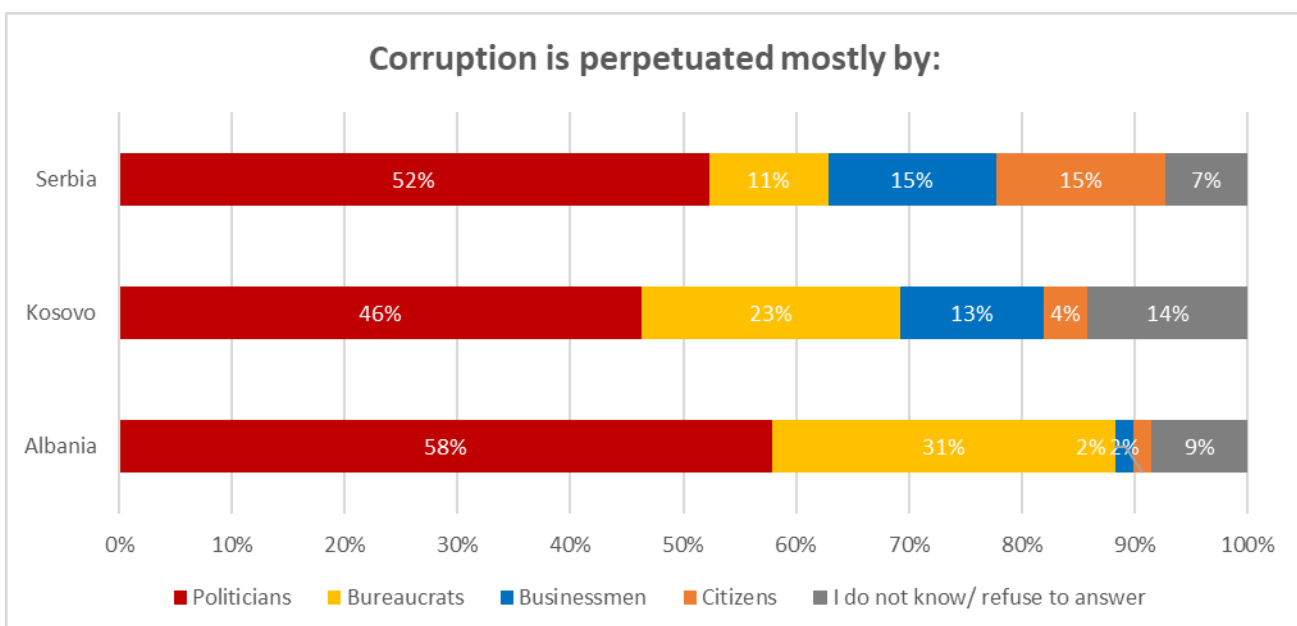
1.2. “Co-existence” with corruption or lack of strategies and will to fight it?

In order to better understand the respondents’ approach to corruption and to whom they attribute the phenomenon, the interviewees were asked from which group corruption is practiced more (Figure 6). The group which has the highest frequency of election in all three countries are the *politicians*, elected respectively Albania - 58%, Serbia - 52% and Kosovo - 46%. The fight against corruption is related to political will in the citizen perception and therefore the finger is pointed at politicians.

What is also noticeable is the higher perception in Albania that corruption is also practiced by officials (31%), a figure which can be argued with the fact that Albania is a country with high levels of party patronage and nepotism¹², contrary to the significantly lower figure of this perception in Serbia (11%), hinting that the Serbian administration can be more efficient in providing public services at the local level.

Positive for Serbia is the perception that the *citizens* (15%) who cooperate are also responsible for the phenomenon of corruption, implying that the population’s awareness of this factor is higher than in the other two countries where the figures for this indicator are only 2% (Albania) and 4% (Kosovo). The higher number in Kosovo of people who *don’t answer don’t know/refuse to answer*, shows that the awareness of the effects of corruption is lower and that the pressure against corruption whistleblowers is higher.

Figure 6. Practitioners of corruption



¹² With the support of the American Embassy in Tirana, ACER has undertaken a special study on this topic, the findings of which are expected to be published within 2023.

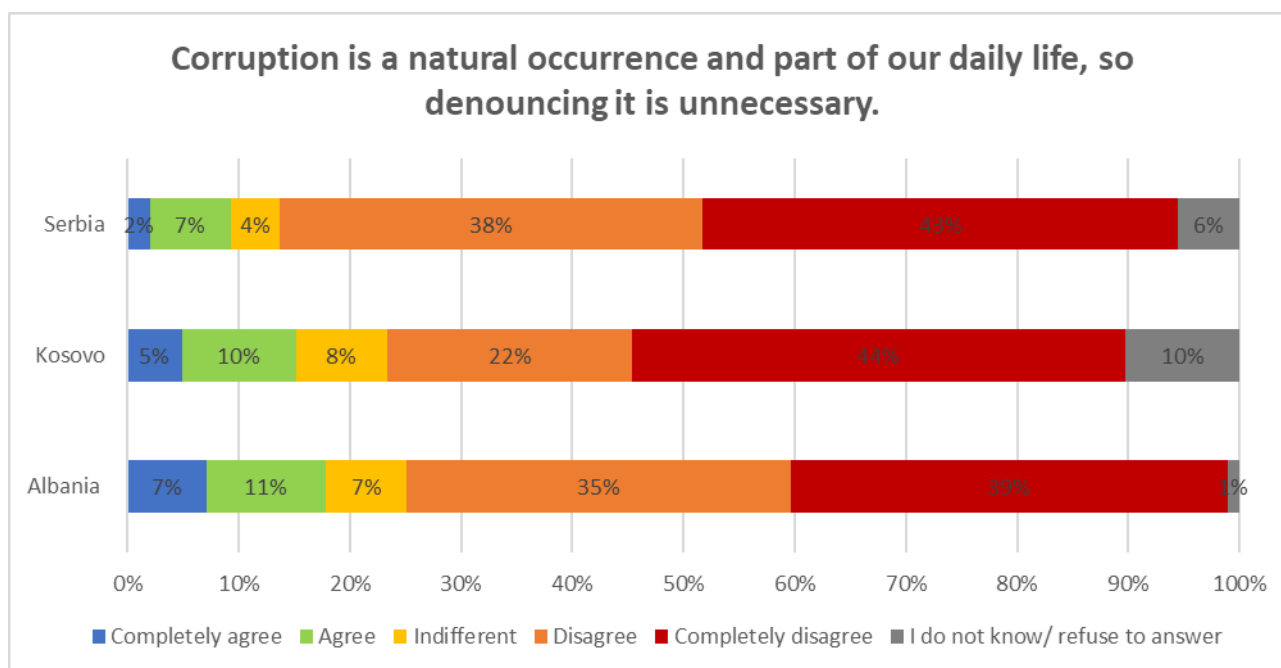
1.2.1 Is corruption a part of everyday life or are there missing efficient strategies and the will to fight it?

Respondents were asked to rate three different statements on corruption on a scale of 1-5 where 1 – not at all agree and 5 – completely agree. The trend for the three countries is similar for each of the statements, with small differences between them. Detailed analyses of each of them are given below.

The first statement concerns the treatment of *corruption as a routine phenomenon* considering its denunciation as unnecessary (Figure 7), for which the majority of respondents in the three countries (respectively 81% in Serbia, 74% in Albania and 66 % in Kosovo) *disagree/ completely disagree* with the statement. These figures are positive as they show that there is a growing awareness of citizens to fight corruption, in all three countries, taking into account the fact that it is one of the phenomena that remains the main obstacle to integration in the European Union (Serbia and Albania are currently with candidate country status).

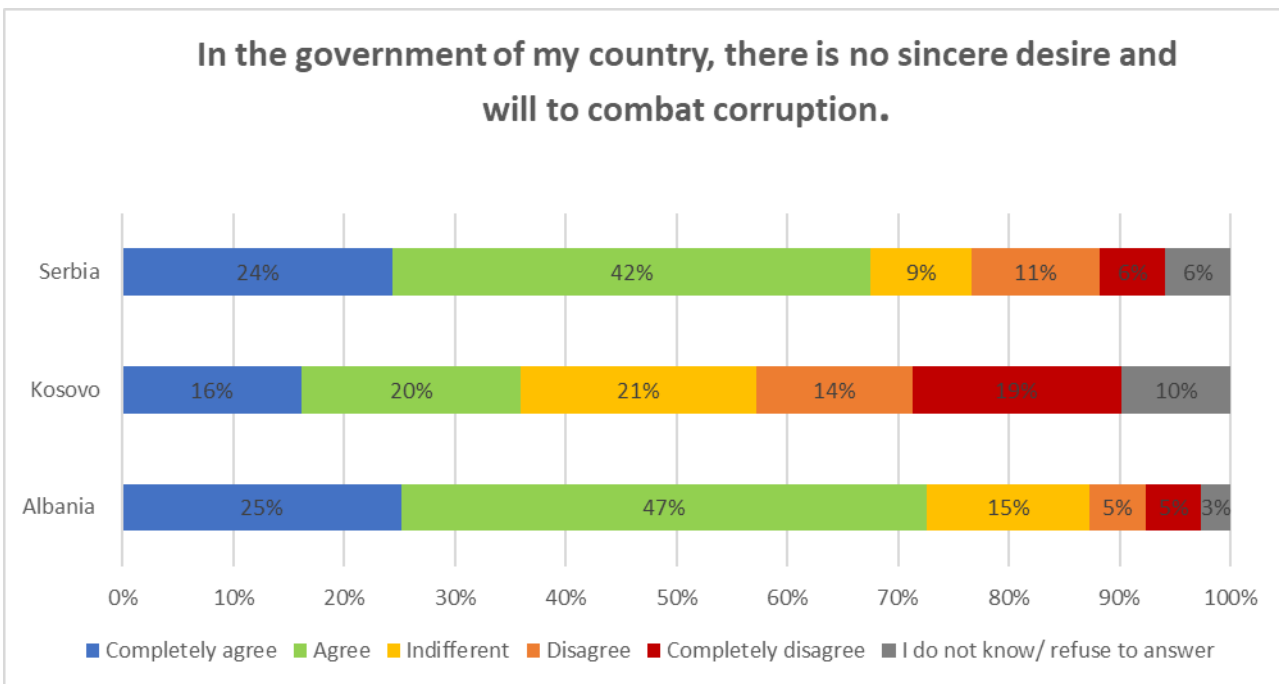
Worrying are the rest of the respondents, mainly in Albania and Kosovo, who chose the options *completely agree/agree and indifferent* (23% in Kosovo, 25% in Albania and 13% in Serbia), where almost ¼ of the respondents see corruption as a routine phenomenon which should not be fought/denounced. For this reason, in these countries, the role of civil society organizations should be strengthened to raise awareness among the population about the negative effects that corruption brings to their lives, the need to denounce it, and the ways of addressing their complaints.

Figure 7. Evaluation for the first statement



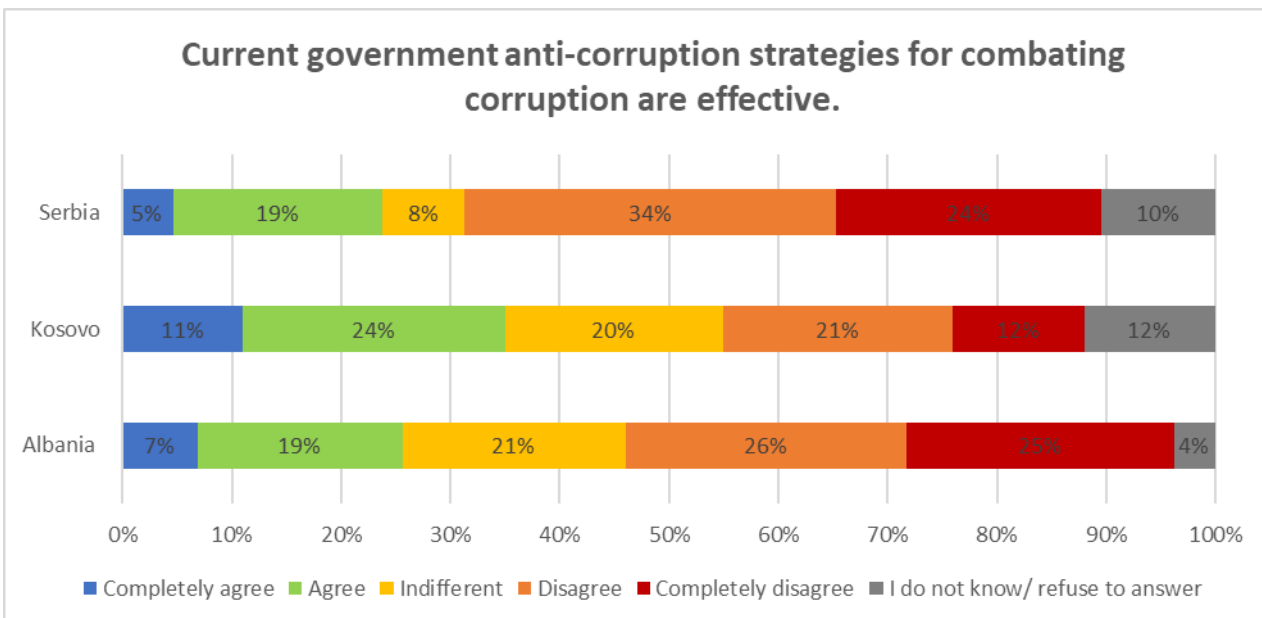
The second statement is about the *political will to fight corruption* in the governments of the respective countries, from which we notice that the majority of respondents in Albania and Serbia *agree and completely agree* that there is a *lack of sincere political will* (72% in Albania and 66% in Serbia), these numbers show the low trustworthiness of the citizens towards the government. This mistrust is also related to previous findings on the practitioners of corruption, where the greatest weight was occupied by politicians. It is noted that Kosovo has the lowest number of respondents who *agree and completely agree with the statement* (36%) and the highest number of respondents who choose the options *indifferent/disagree and completely disagree* (54%), meaning this fact that Kosovar citizens have more confidence that the government has political will and is making efforts to fight corruption in the country. These differences between the countries are also influenced by the fact that Kosovo is the youngest country among them which is facing many vicissitudes and countries which have not yet recognized it as a country and Kosovo's efforts in this direction are greater.

Figure 8. Evaluation for the second statement



The third statement asks respondents to assess the fact that the *anti-corruption strategies of the current government are effective*, from which a significant number of respondents *disagree and completely disagree* with the statement (58% in Serbia, 51% in Albania and 33% in Kosovo). While the highest numbers of respondents who *agree and completely agree* with the statement are in Kosovo (35%) compared to Albania (26%) and Serbia (24%). Again, we find a more positive approach among the citizens of Kosovo who seem to have more confidence than in the other two countries that *corruption can be fought and that the government is supporting them in the fight against it*. What is noticeable in this statement is the high number of respondents who choose to remain indifferent or not answer (32% in Kosovo, 25% in Albania and 18% in Serbia). The reason why this happens may be the fact that citizens do not have the necessary information on the anti-corruption measures undertaken by the governments of their countries and therefore choose not to respond or pre-announce. These created spaces should be used by the civil society organizations of the country to contribute to the awareness of the citizens about the problems that surround them.

Figure 9. Evaluation for the third statement



1.3 Pressure from the administration and the obligation to pay bribes

Citizens were asked at what frequency (how often) you *had to pay unofficial payments to get the required service for some categories of services*, evaluating their answer on a scale from 1-5 where 1 – *never* and 5 – *always* (Table 1). In general, it is observed that the highest frequencies are for the answer option “*frequently*”, which means that pressures for bribes are present in all three countries analyzed.

Regarding the receipt of basic services, it is noted that the respondents from all three countries chose the “*frequently*” option (respectively 40.3% in Albania, 34.2% in Serbia and 25.9% in Kosovo), while Kosovo there is the highest number of respondents who chose the option

“never” (16.1%) and “I don’t know/refuse to answer” (17.1%). These data are disturbing and should be viewed with special interest since the impossibility to receive basic services without paying in hand proves the misgovernance and dysfunction of the state at alarming levels.

While in order to obtain permits or licenses, Albania has the highest number of respondents who choose the “frequently” option (35.6%), while in Kosovo and Serbia the highest number of respondents choose *not to answer* (23.5 % in Kosovo and 28% in Serbia). Despite respondents choosing not to answer, both countries have high percentages of choosing the option “most times” with 21% each¹³.

For the option of *speeding up judicial procedures*, Albania continues to have the same tendency as in the two statements above, while 39.7% of respondents in Serbia and 26.8% of them in Kosovo choose not to answer. Kosovo has a high percentage of respondents who choose the “never” option (24.4%), which means that the judicial system of this country is less affected by corruption compared to the other two countries that we are analyzing.

For the tax service, the majority of respondents in Albania and Serbia chose the option that they *often had to pay bribes* (27.8% in Albania and 28.9% in Serbia). While in Kosovo it seems that a significant number of respondents have never had to pay a bribe for this service (23.9%) and the majority choose *not to answer* (28.3%).

In general, the administration of Kosovo seems to be less corrupt compared to the other two countries where citizens often had to pay bribes to receive basic services.

Table 1. Assessment of the obligation to pay bribes

How frequently do typical households find themselves obliged to give unofficial payments or presents/gifts to public officials?																		
Rate	Never			Seldom			Frequently			Most times			Always			DK/NA		
Country	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS
To obtain basic public services	3.3	16,1	7,3	18.5	23.4	32,9	40.3	25.9	34,2	21.2	14.2	9,7	10.2	3.4	2,0	6.5	17.1	13,9
To obtain licenses or permits	3.8	19,1	9,3	19.4	10.8	9,3	35.6	20.1	25,8	18.7	21.1	21,0	8.9	5.4	6,6	13.6	23.5	28,0
To speed up legal proceedings in the judicial branch	3.1	24,4	7,7	14.5	11.2	15,5	33.6	14.2	27,2	22.0	13.7	7,9	12.7	9.8	2,0	14.0	26.8	39,7
To update/revise tax status	4.7	23,9	4,6	16.5	17.6	11,7	27.8	16.1	28,9	17.6	9.8	19,6	7.3	4.4	19,2	26.1	28.3	15,9

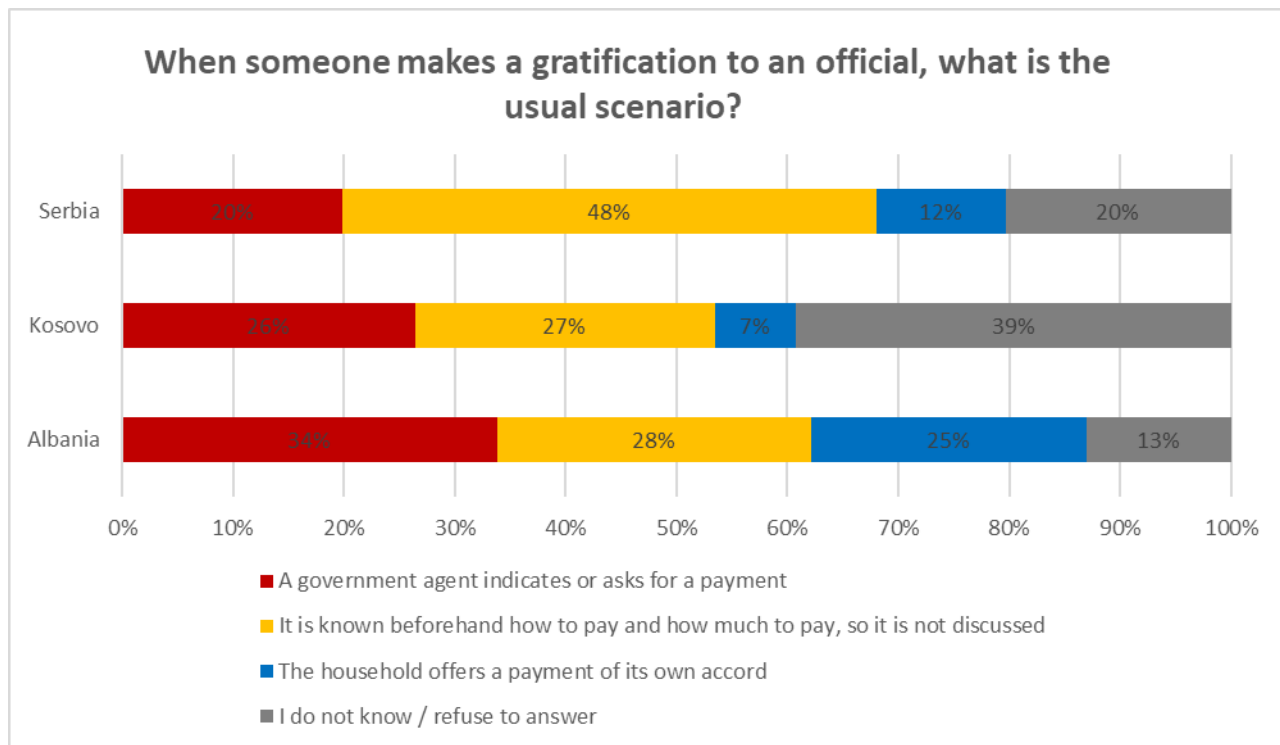
¹³ This high level of corruption has also been found in a number of previous studies undertaken by ACER over the last two decades.

1.3.1 Possible scenarios of how corruption develops

Citizens of all three countries were asked what is the usual scenario in cases where you are pressured to pay bribes (Figure 10), from which it turns out that the most likely scenario in Albania with almost 1/3 (34%) of respondents who what they confirm is that the administration employee himself implies or asks for the payment of a bribe to provide the service for which he is paid to provide it. Meanwhile, in Serbia, almost ½ (48%) of the respondents say that it is known in advance how much money must be paid and how it must be paid to receive the relevant public service, so it is a routine process that is considered as something common and has become part of the culture of the country's administration.

Kosovo, as reflected in the analysis of table 1, has a different approach as most respondents (39%) choose the option *I don't know/refuse to answer*. Based on the findings above, we can say that Kosovo is less prone to the phenomenon of bribery and seems to have a more functional administration. Of course, there are bribery particles which appear in 27% of respondents who choose the second option and 26% who choose the first option.

Figure 10. Possible scenarios for bribery

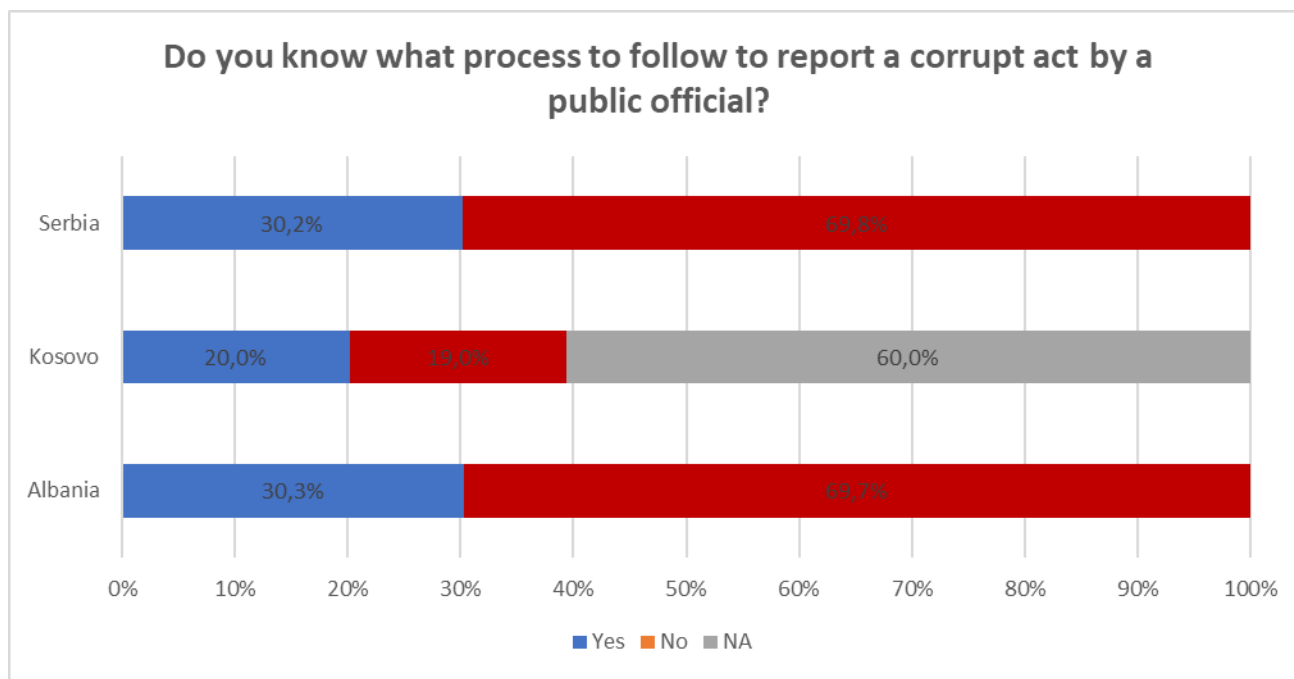


2. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION REPORTING PROCEDURES

Knowing the procedures for reporting corrupt acts is one of the main pillars for success in the fight against it. For this reason, citizens were asked about their knowledge of the path they should follow to report a corrupt act by public administration employees (Figure 11).

The data, which emerge from this question, are really worrying since 69.7% of the respondents in Albania and 69.8% of the respondents in Serbia have no information on the reporting procedures. Only 20% of respondents in Kosovo, 30.2% in Serbia and 30.3% in Albania have knowledge about the process. Apparently, despite the governments' efforts to fund the institutions' transparency programs, their effectiveness seems to be very low. Lack of information and ignorance of citizens are a suitable habitat for the formation and survival of corrupt acts.

Figure 11. Corruption reporting process



The few citizens who had knowledge about the process of reporting corrupt acts were asked to evaluate some aspects of the process on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 - do not agree at all and 5 - completely agree (Table 2). The first aspect that you were asked to evaluate was the effectiveness through a statement that states that the process was very effective, from which it follows that a high number of respondents in Serbia (61%) and Albania (60%) disagree and completely disagree with the affirmation. While the trend in Kosovo seems to be different where the majority (36%) choose not to answer, but 26% of respondents agree and completely agree with the statement.

The other statement about the process that had to be evaluated by the respondents has to do with its ease, from which it turns out that 63% of the respondents in Serbia disagree and completely disagree with the statement; 44% of respondents in Albania agree and completely agree with the statement, while 45% of respondents in Kosovo choose not to answer. Various figures for this statement are expected, given that the processes are different in different areas and countries, and therefore the citizen's attitude is not the same.

As for the protection of the reporter from "retaliation", a high number of respondents declare that they do not feel protected at all, evaluating the statement with a scale of disagree/completely disagree (68% in Serbia, 63% in Albania and 35% in Kosovo). Feeling vulnerable against the other person who commits the corrupt act in most cases pushes the reporting person not to complete the reporting procedure, leaving in effect an inefficient process.

Respondents in Kosovo are noted to have a step to answer questions about the reporting process, where in the analysis above (Figure 11) we have a figure of 60% of Kosovar citizens who have chosen not to answer. The same trend continues in this section, where for each statement, the highest figure is that of respondents who chose the option I don't know/refuse to answer. This hesitation may come from the fact that Kosovar citizens are not familiar with this process and that there is a significant need for informing society, not only in Kosovo, but also in the other two countries.

Table 2. Evaluation of the reporting process

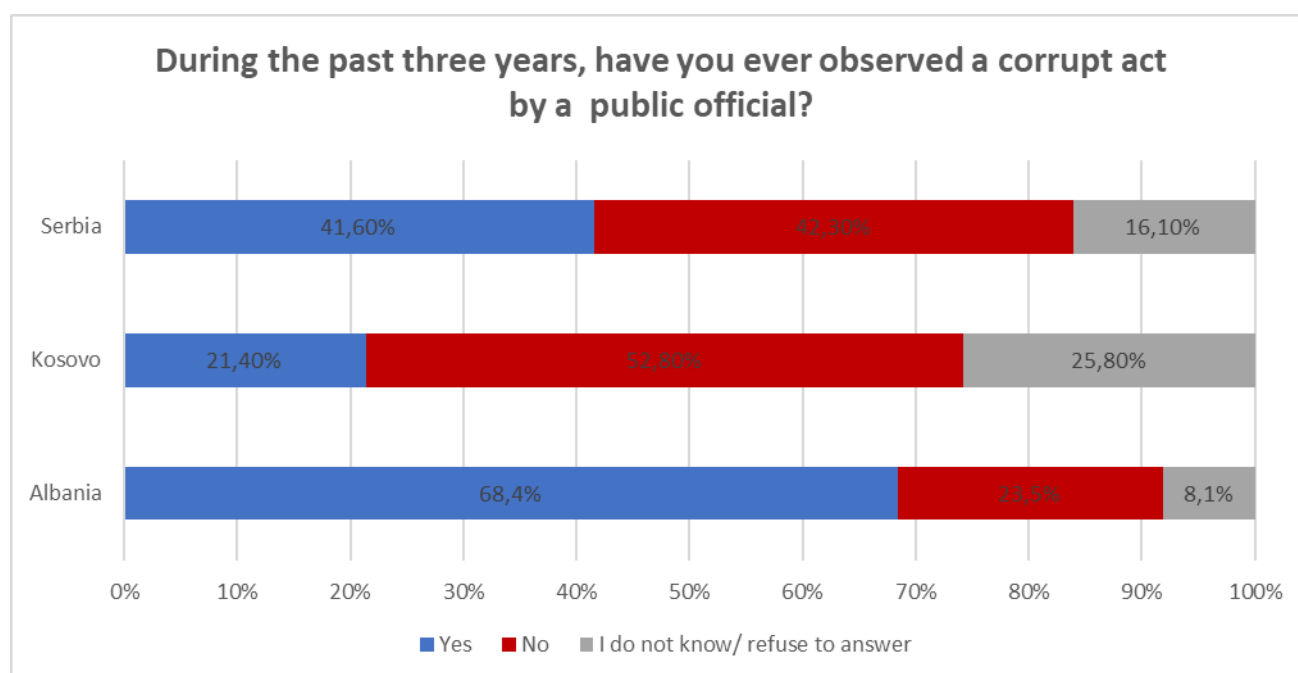
How would you evaluate the process of reporting corruption?												
Country	Completely Disagree / Disagree			Indifferent			Completely agree/ Agree			I do not know/ refuse to answer		
	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS
The process is very effective	60%	17%	61%	24%	21%	15%	16%	26%	19%	1%	36%	5%
The process is very simple	26%	18%	63%	26%	27%	15%	44%	10%	18%	3%	45%	4%
The reporter is well protected from potential harassment	63%	35%	68%	26%	19%	9%	16%	5%	18%	5%	41%	6%

2.1 Reporting rate and main influencing factors

Citizens were asked if they have ever encountered suspected acts of corruption by administration employees (Figure 12), from which it results that the majority of respondents in Albania (68.4%) and a part in Serbia (41.6%) have encountered while a good part of the respondents in Kosovo (52.8%) and a part in Serbia (42.3%) have not. In all questions, however, the citizens of Albania feel freer from government pressure to answer than the citizens of Serbia and Kosovo, or perhaps they are more informed than them.

Kosovo and Serbia have a significant number of respondents who choose not to answer, respectively 25.8% and 16.1%, which shows that in these countries there is a step to answer, therefore the figures of Albania are also inconsistent with them.

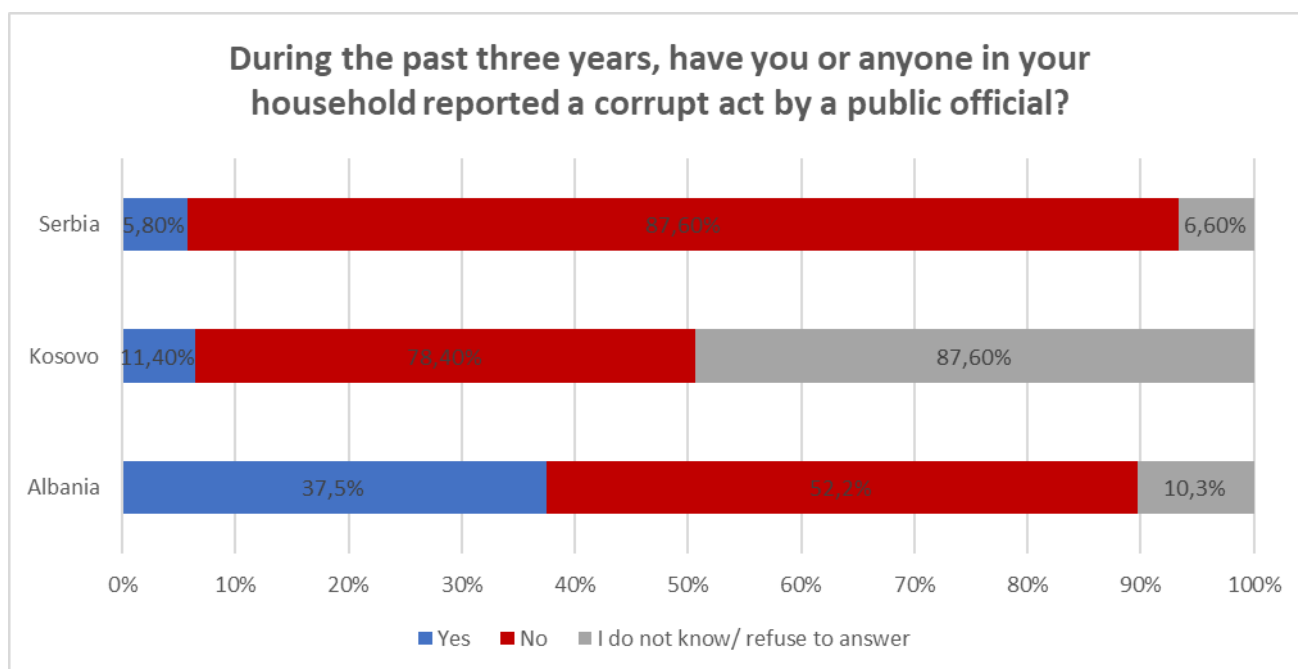
Figure 12. Corrupt acts from administration employees



Citizens were asked if they themselves or any family member reported any corrupt act by administration employees during the last three years (Figure 13), from which it results that the majority of respondents from the three countries did not report any corrupt act, respectively 87, 6% in Serbia, 78.04% in Kosovo and 52.2% in Albania.

However, Albania has the highest number of respondents who confirm that they have reported (37.5%). This figure may come as a result of the way the officials requested the bribe where in Albania it was generally requested by the official himself (analyzed above) and this direct way is sometimes not expected and shows a direct lack of integrity and leads to reporting immediate.

Figure 13. Reporting of corrupt acts



The choice not to report corrupt cases is influenced by various reasons, therefore the respondents were asked to evaluate *the reasons for non-reporting* on a scale from 1-5 where 1 – *does not affect at all* and 5 – *affects a lot*.

In Albania and Serbia, the respondents assess the fact that the cases cannot be proven as the most influential causes (valuing them as affecting/affecting a lot) (66% in Albania and 62.9% in Serbia); the fact that there would be no effort even if the decision was taken (73.7% in Albania and 66.7% in Serbia) and the worries that come as a result of revenge (76.2% in Albania and 82.8% In Serbia).

The high figures of fear of retaliation are extremely worrying as they show a marked lack of integrity of the officials in these two countries, which leads to successive problems that are directly or indirectly related to the problems raised in the entire report on corruption/ non-reporting, etc.

Meanwhile, in Kosovo, the respondents are more reserved, since more than half of them choose not to answer or remain indifferent to the issues raised. This indifference can come from the fact that even in the previous questions, Kosovo had the highest tendency of respondents who choose the option *I don't know/refuse to answer*, which means that it can come as a result of the lack of information about the whole process of general reporting of suspected cases of corruption.

Even for these indicators, the number of people who have no knowledge is in very high numbers compared to the other two countries.

Table 3. Causes of non-reporting of corruption cases

The main reasons that influence the non-reporting of corruption cases												
Country	Affects it / Affects it a lot			Indifferent			Affect it a little / Does not affect it at all			I do not know		
	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS	AL	XK	RS
Not knowing where to report	53,2%	17%	65,1%	7,3%	25%	8,8%	33,3%	28%	21,4%	6,0%	30%	4,6%
Cases cannot be proved	66%	13%	62,9%	9,8%	25%	17,0%	18,5%	26%	7,1%	5,8%	36%	13,0%
The process is too complex and long	53,9%	11%	64,0%	10,9%	23%	18,5%	27,9%	24%	5,7%	7,3%	42%	11,7%

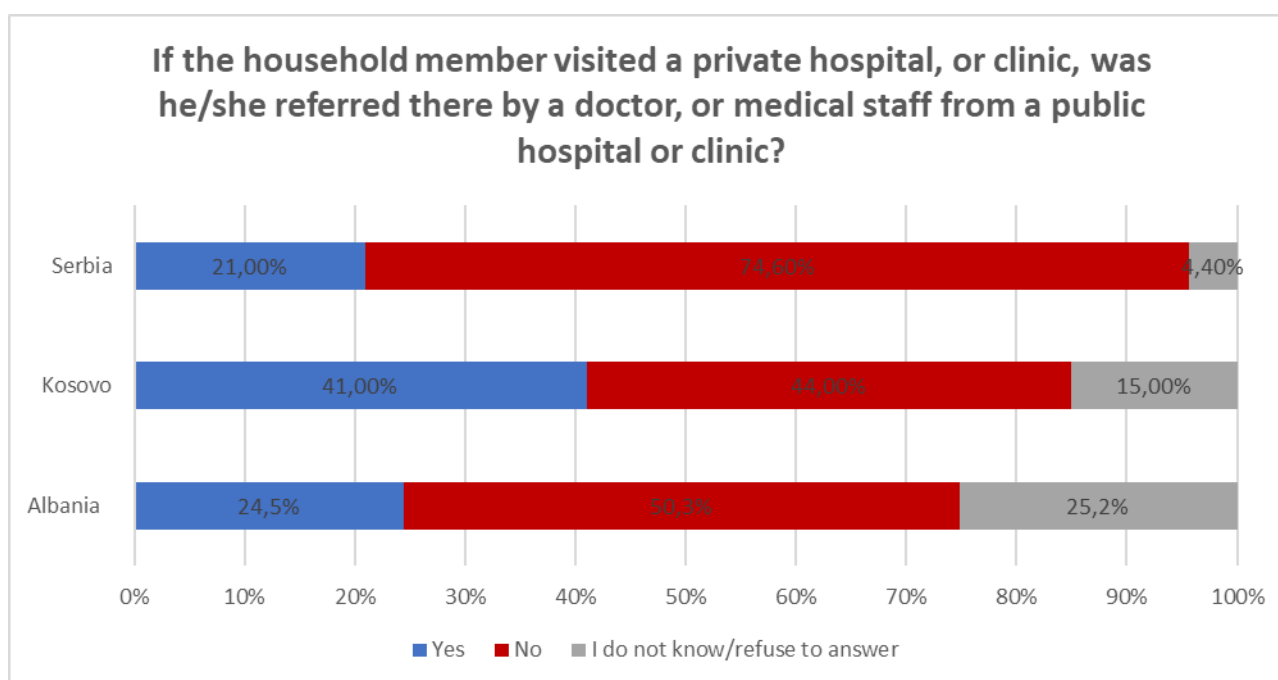
Corruption is very common	52,7%	14%	57,2%	11,4%	28%	8,8%	30,7%	27%	1,0%	5,1%	31%	23,0%
Bribes can be justified under the current economic situation	44,4%	14%	51,2%	7,8%	24%	10,2%	41%	20%	16,1%	6,9%	42%	22,5%
Investigations cannot be made about the report	66,2%	14%	43,3%	8,7%	21%	21,0%	15,8%	21%	13,7%	9,4%	42%	22,1%
There would be no enforcement even if the decision is made	73,7%	14%	66,7%	8,0%	20%	11,5%	12,9%	24%	5,5%	5,3%	42%	16,3%
Concern about potential harassment and reprisal	76,2%	11%	82,8%	6,2%	31%	2,9%	12,3%	24%	3,1%	5,3%	34%	11,3%

2.2 The main problems regarding basic public services

A disturbing phenomenon that citizens encounter when they need to seek medical help is the referral made by state hospital doctors to private ones where they may be employed. For this reason, the respondents were asked if they or any of their family members have ever encountered this phenomenon (Figure 15). The highest numbers of respondents who have encountered the phenomenon are registered in Kosovo with a little less than ½ of them (41%), followed by Albania (24.5%) and Serbia (21%).

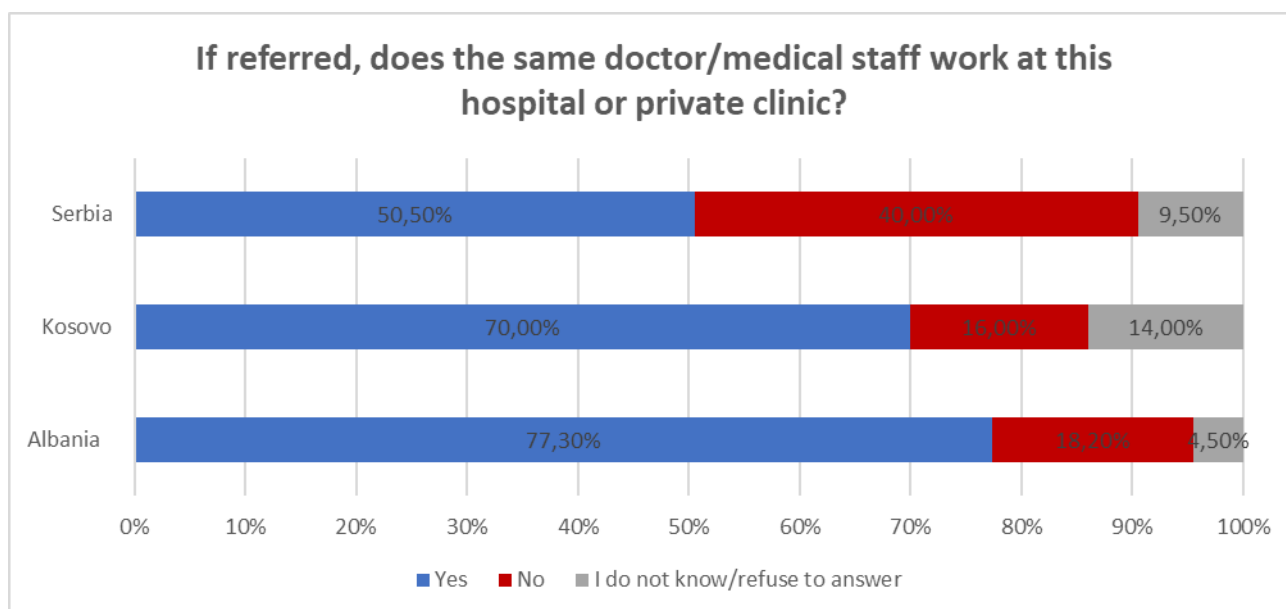
These figures show that there are abuses made by medical personnel for their personal benefits by forcing patients to pay for a service that they could get for free in the state hospital. However, the positive side is the fact that most of the respondents stated that they have not encountered the phenomenon (74.6% in Serbia, 50.3% in Albania and 44% in Kosovo).

Figure 14. Referrals to private hospitals



To continue with the analysis of referrals to private hospitals, the respondents who chose that they had encountered the phenomenon of referral to private hospitals were asked if they encountered the same personnel in the private hospital where they were referred (Figure 15). The figures show that a good part of the respondents encountered the same personnel when they visited the private hospital (77.3% of the respondents in Albania, 70% in Kosovo and 50.5% in Serbia). These alarming figures confirm the above conclusion that the medical staff is using the post and referring patients to receive paid services in private hospitals in which the referring staff has its own benefits, manipulating them with the excuses of better room conditions, beds, personnel, etc. referring staff has its own benefits, manipulating them with the excuses of better room conditions, beds, personnel, etc.

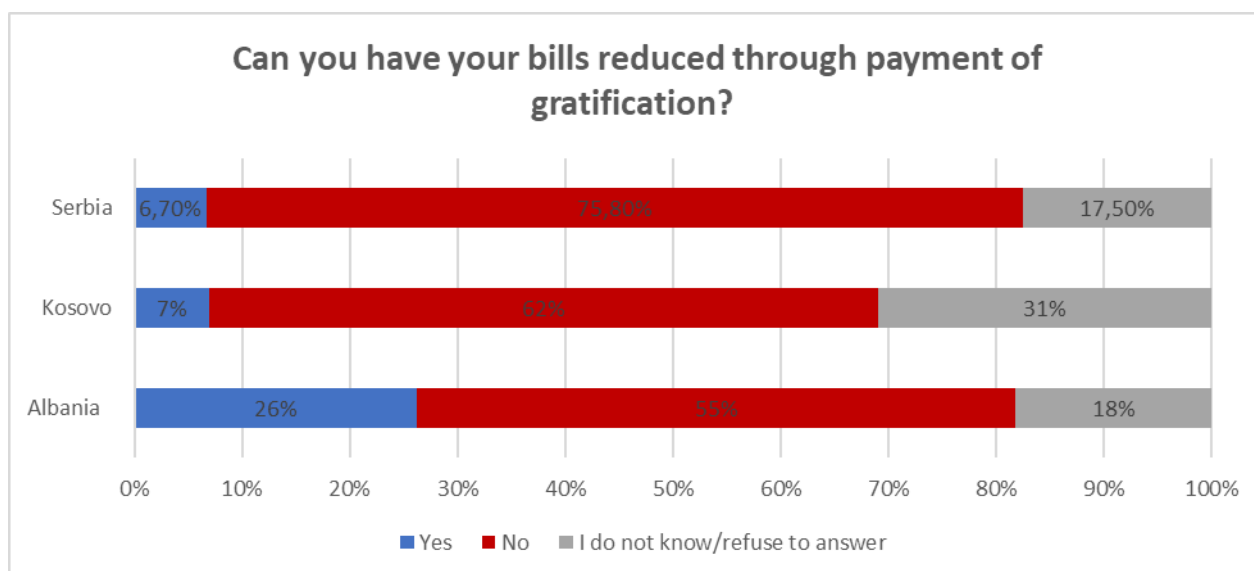
Figure 15. Referrals and personnel



In addition to medical services, another very vital service for citizens is the provision of water and electricity. To measure the level of corruption for these services, citizens were asked if they could reduce their water and energy bills by paying bribes (Figure 16), from which the majority of respondents (75.8% in Albania, 62% in Kosovo and 55% in Albania)) state that this is not possible. In Albania, the situation seems to be a bit more worrying as almost 1/3 (26%) of the respondents declare that they can lower their bills by paying bribes, unlike the lower percentages of the other two countries (7% in Kosovo and 6.7 % In Serbia).

Something else worth mentioning is the fact that we noticed a significant number of respondents choosing not to answer this question (31% in Kosovo, 18% in Albania and 17.5% in Serbia). This hesitation may come from the fear that they may be found out, and in some countries the manipulations or thefts that are carried out for these services are punished with fines or even prison terms.

Figure 16. Reduction of bills through the payment of bribes

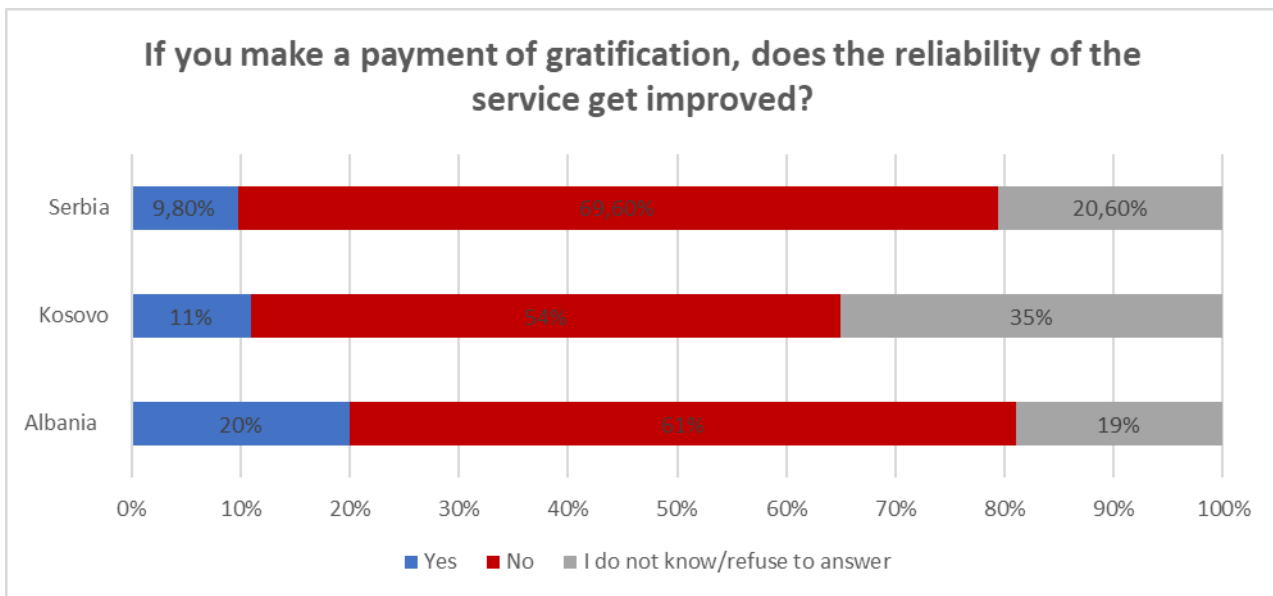


To continue our analysis of the water and energy supply service, citizens were asked whether the payment of bribes improves the sustainability of the service (Figure 17).

A good part of the respondents (69.6% in Serbia, 61% in Albania and 54% in Kosovo) state that this does not happen. Albania follows the same trend as the previous question, continuing to have the highest number of respondents who confirm that paying bribes leads to improved sustainability (20% in Albania versus 11% in Kosovo and 9.8% in Serbia). This approach of the Albanian citizens who believe that there is an improvement of the service, pushes them to go more towards the payment of bribes, as expressed in the above analysis.

Even in this case, a considerable number of respondents choose not to answer (35% in Kosovo, 20.6% in Serbia and 19% in Albania). Continuing with the previous reasoning, the fear of penalization leads the respondents to be more reserved in their answers.

Figure 17. Deterioration of service stability after payment of bribe



3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Some main conclusions

Corruption continues to remain in worrying numbers under the lens of citizen perception, where more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents in each country (80.4% in Albania, 74.6% in Kosovo and 79.4% in Serbia) consider it a problem serious and very serious about the city. Progress during the last 10 years is viewed with more pessimism in Albania and Serbia, where it is estimated that it is worse and much worse than 10 years ago by more than half of the respondents (71.7% in Albania and 57.9% in Serbia).

Respondents in all three countries “blame” mostly politicians as the group that practices more corruption (chosen by 58% of respondents in Albania, 52% in Kosovo and 46% in Serbia).

The political will to fight corruption from the governments of the countries where the study was conducted is perceived in very low numbers (72% of respondents in Albania do not trust the political will of the government, 66% in Albania and 36% in Kosovo).

The governments’ efforts to fight corruption are assessed as ineffective by almost $\frac{1}{2}$ of the respondents in Albania and Serbia (58% in Serbia and 51% in Albania) and almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents in Kosovo (33%).

Almost half of the respondents in Albania and Serbia state that *they have had to pay bribes to get basic services, permits or licenses, to speed up court processes or to review taxes*. In Kosovo, this phenomenon is encountered less often and the respondents chose not to answer in most cases.

The main scenario of *how bribes are paid* in Albania is through a direct or implied request of the official, confirmed by $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents (34%). While almost half of the respondents in Serbia (48%) confirm that they know in advance how much and how the payment should be made, without the need to discuss. In Kosovo, things seem to be 50/50 between the two scenarios above (26% first scenario and 27% second scenario).

The vast majority of respondents in the three cities do not know what process should be followed to report a corrupt act (69.8% in Serbia, 69.7% in Albania and 19% in Kosovo).

More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the respondents in each of the countries evaluate *the corruption reporting system as ineffective, complicated and feel vulnerable against possible reprisals that may come as a result of reporting*. Respondents in Kosovo mostly choose to remain indifferent or not to answer questions of this type.

$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ of the respondents (87.6% in Serbia, 78.04% in Kosovo and 52.2% in Albania) *have never reported any case of corrupt acts that they or their family members may have encountered*.

The main reasons why citizens choose not to report corruption cases are:

- It is difficult to prove/provide evidence that the case really happened;
- There is no effort to improve even in cases where decisions are made;
- Concerns that come as a result of fear of possible reprisals;

A part of the respondents are referred to *private clinics* by the doctors of the state hospitals where they approach to benefit from the necessary service and in these cases the referral more than half of the respondents (77.3% in Albania, 70% in Kosovo and 50.5% in Serbia) confirm that they met *the same staff at the private clinic where they were referred*.

3.1. Some key recommendations of respondents

City of Durrës (Albania)	City of Lipjan (Kosovo)	Smederevo City (Serbia)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendation which received the highest approval in terms of the consent of the citizens is “All public employees must sign a code of conduct which shows the principles of behavior with citizens”. • Posting of citizen’s rights in all offices is another policy preferred by respondents and considered valuable by them. 80.09% of the interviewees think that the implementation of such a recommendation would be quite effective or very effective. • The interviewees (79.3%) think that in addition to the code of conduct and the posting of rights, better training for public employees to give them the necessary knowledge and skills should be applied so that the overall quality of the services they receive from the public sector result in a significant increase. • Taking into consideration the two recommendations above, we see that all directions lead to the fact that there is a lack of proper behavior on the part of the administration, as well as the necessary training that this personnel should have. As a preventive measure, citizens are required to be made aware of their rights by enabling them to be posted in all offices. • In line with previous responses, interviewees seem to see salary increases as the best way to prevent corruption. Respectively, 76.6% of respondents think that this measure would be quite effective and very effective. • Based on the low rate of complaints, the interviewees recommend that better appeal and complaint procedures be developed for citizens (74.4% of the interviewees) as well as better and functional procedures for complaining in courts against the actions of public employees (72.1 % of interviewees). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Among the basic recommendations of the citizens, there are those related to the seriousness of the handling of complaints. Currently, there is a very widespread impression that the problems that citizens encounter in their confrontation with the institutional axis, including corrupt practices and possible momentary abuses, are almost in most cases not treated seriously. • Citizens recommend a greater commitment of public institutions, to act concretely, quickly and to bring concrete conclusions in relation to complaints or allegations, as well as to keep citizens informed about the epilogue of those complaints, as a necessity to increase their level of confidence in the complaint. • The citizens of the Municipality of Lipjan to a certain extent perceive corruption as an ordinary phenomenon, something that exists as a closed relationship between the actors of the corrupt practice, which as a phenomenon is also difficult to argue and as a result, has a demotivation to demand responsibility in cases where corruption appears as a culture and work practice. • The main recommendation that derives from the perceptions of the citizens of the Municipality of Lipjan is that of increasing institutional efficiency in handling reported cases, as an opportunity to increase citizens’ awareness for bolder and faster reporting of illegal affairs and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendation that received the highest approval (average grade 4.55) in terms of citizens’ consent is “Strengthening controls and punishments for public officials”. This recommendation is in the first place of the reform measures for the improvement of the local administration. • Citizens give the most importance to the recommendation for stricter controls and punishments of public servants (25.8%), in second place is: Increasing the salaries of public servants (21.4%). • Citizens are aware that they bear a good part of the responsibility for the existence of corruption in the provision of public services and because they declare (12.8%) that “strict punishments should be applied to those citizens who pay bribes to public sector employees” and this is a positive indicator of their awareness and success in the fight against corruption.

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