

# VIEWS ON MEDIA & CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

EXTRACTS FROM 2019-2020 TARGET  
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



*Skyline of Tirana, Albania*

# INTRODUCTION

Climate change presents the most unprecedented and complex challenge of the modern era. It emblemizes what it means to be in the epoch of the 'Anthropocene'; where the impact of human life on Earth has transcended all other structures and systems otherwise constructed to compartmentalise human experience. By cutting across the boundaries of nation states, languages, and socio-economic systems, climate change subsequently intensifies present conflicts over our current taxonomies, be they borders or the division of natural resources. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder of how difficult many find it to put the needs of the most vulnerable before their own. As global superpowers navigate the magnitude of this challenge alongside other geo-political concerns, it is important to remain cognizant of the ways in which climate change is approached and perceived by individuals and how it interacts with local concerns and opinions. After all, it is the interaction between the macro, meso, and micro, that makes climate change such a unique yet critical challenge.

The Western Balkans is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. An increased duration and frequency of heat waves and droughts, an increased risk of flooding, forest degradation, a decrease in crop yields through shifting seasonal patterns, and the degradation of drinking water quality/supply are only a few of the issues beginning to seriously impact citizens. In addition to newly emerging challenges, the region continues to struggle with air quality and waste management given the impact of recent conflict on infrastructure.

The continued usage of fossil fuels alongside economic dependence on polluting heavy industries also remains an ongoing point of contention, with governments reluctant to impact investment opportunities by imposing environmental limitations on mineral extraction or energy producing activities.

A 2019 report by the Global Alliance for Health and Pollution, GAHP, found that Serbia had Europe's worst per capita record for pollution-related deaths. In 2014, severe flooding in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Serbia resulting from three months of rain falling in three days caused billions of euros worth of damage, required the evacuation of major urban areas, affected almost two million people, killed almost 100, and triggered a national state of emergency in BiH. The 2014 floods followed similarly unprecedented flooding in 2010, which also affected Montenegro, after heavy rain pushed the River Drina to its highest level in 100 years. The flooding was then followed by a severe drought in 2011, which required a temporary 50% increase in energy importation due to a loss of performance at key hydro-electric power stations. Droughts have also caused an increase in forest fires since 2000, with one of the most severe seasons in 2012, when nearly 500 interventions on fires in forest or pasture were made in Kosovo.

As with anywhere in the world, it is difficult to pin any single crisis event on climate change alone. However, the frequency and severity of these incidences are likely to exponentially increase as global temperatures rise, placing strain on economic systems and governing structures.

## THE RESEARCH

As part of a Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (FCDO) funded programme on media literacy and strengthening independent media in the Western Balkans, Albany Associates carried out a target audience analysis to inform the evolution of activities and understand the concerns and perspectives of a sample of individuals in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. The first round of focus groups was conducted in late 2019 in Albania, BiH, North Macedonia and Serbia. Building on these efforts, and to ensure that the project had data from all countries, two large online surveys were conducted in Kosovo and Montenegro in 2020. The project had previously planned focus groups in these countries as well, but ultimately opted for remote surveys due to COVID-19 restrictions. These surveys provided multiple choice options for each question as well as the opportunity for some open-ended responses, allowing for significant quantitative results to be achieved. Themes surrounding media consumption, dis and misinformation, fact checking, and a spectrum of local and international issues were explored alongside perspectives on climate change.

The intersectionality between media and climate change cannot be underestimated. Public awareness, understanding and thus mobilisation on environmental issues are directly related to the freedom and diversity of the media to report factual information drawn from credible sources, which, in turn, are related to journalists' capacity to report on this subject matter area.

Independent media is also key to holding institutional structures accountable in cases of potential environmental degradation, mismanagement of resources, or unsustainable development, and can provide a voice to those most affected by climate change or disenfranchised by current policies. At the same time, the media can highlight positive steps taken to slow climate change and address its impact on both national and international levels, increasing a sense of positive proactivity towards a topic that can often feel oppressively overwhelming for individuals already facing varying socio-economic hardships.

Before proceeding, it must be noted that while the research results in this report were funded by the FCDO, the results and analysis presented are not a reflection of the FCDO's outlook or approach, and only those of the author. This report aims to inform the reader on the diverse, individual perspectives on climate change across the Western Balkans region, as well as the forces which shape and interact with those views, particularly in relation to media and information. By focusing on and responding to the interconnecting network of local concerns and challenges, any climate-focused initiatives will have greater impact and sustainability. Throughout each chapter, we look at participants' local and other global concerns before focusing more closely on climate change. This allows any reader to understand the context within which issues related to climate change and environmentalism are understood and thus why certain views or responses are given.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Balancing Priorities

---

People are de-incentivised to act on climate change because they already face other issues, such as economic hardship, corruption, political instability and emigration/brain drain.

### Lack of Local Information

---

While many are aware of climate change and concerned about its consequences, there is a lack of local information or reporting on the topic in local media. Most sources of information are international and climate issues were mainly reported in connection with specific crisis incidences.

### Communications

---

The importance of engaging particularly younger people on climate issues was mentioned by many. Starting conversations and demonstrating small-scale positive change was seen as key to motivating and inspiring individuals. Social media was suggested by many as an important tool.



### Negative Reporting

---

Media reporting was seen as pessimistic and of poor quality. This was then linked to de-incentivising individuals to invest in solving problems in their local environment. Overly positive reporting was also often seen as disingenuous.

### Responsibility

---

Tackling climate change was seen by many as something that should not necessarily be the responsibility of those in the Balkans but rather of the largest economies and polluters globally. This was connected with a feeling of helplessness about what could be done on an individual level, alongside denial by some that the problem existed in the first place. In addition, participants felt that it was governments' responsibility to lead action with policy creation and implementation.

### Demographic Divisions

---

Many felt that the older generation was less engaged than the younger on climate related issues. This was connected to media consumption patterns. However, younger participants were often overwhelmed with other issues such as unemployment and thus de-incentivised to act. Rural participants were more aware of and concerned with changes in the seasons or weather patterns due to direct observation, while participants from urban areas commented on poor air quality, pollution, and environmental degradation. Women were generally more engaged than men on climate change.

# ALBANIA

---

The focus group discussions (FGDs) in Albania were conducted with a mixture of men and women of different ages in Tirana and Shkodra. For the Tirana FGDs, 16 participants (8 men and 8 women) attended from the age bracket of 18-30. Another 16 participants (also 8 men and 8 women) aged 31 or over also participated in an FGD. The same formula was followed for Shkodra. Thus, 64 individuals, 32 men and 32 women participated in total; 32 in Tirana, 32 in Shkodra and 32 from the age 18-30 and 32 aged 31 or over.

Local concerns about life in Albania centred around the economy, unemployment, emigration, corruption, healthcare and politics, and thus influenced the way in which climate change and global warming were perceived and discussed. Economic concerns included unemployment and low wages and pensions despite high prices and taxes. In Shkodra, participants described the high levels of unemployment and the inability to sell produce to earn an income.



*Skyline of Tirana, Albania*

Limited career opportunities, particularly for young people, were connected to emigration and brain drain. Unemployment was also linked with corruption and the belief that it was necessary to pay in order to get a job.

The cost of healthcare as well as the quality of medicines available to citizens was also of concern. While the FGDs in Albania were conducted before the pandemic, this concern has no doubt intensified during the course of the pandemic.

---

*They don't leave Albania because they want to, but they are forced to do so. However, the media don't show this part and they don't give it the real importance.*

**(Male 30+ Tirana)**

---

Expanding from the local to the global, emigration and conflict were often mentioned by participants, either connected specifically with events such as the civil war in Syria or more generally.

Terrorism was raised by younger and older women in Tirana and older men in Shkodra.

Inequality and poverty on a global scale were mentioned in nearly all group discussions with younger participants in Tirana and Shkodra. One older woman from Tirana also suggested that the media had a role to play in encouraging the public to think about making the world a better place in order to limit conflict and emigration.

---

*People try to move from one place to another for a better life. Places in conflict suffer more from emigration. We should focus on making the world a better place for everyone. The media should give more of this idea for the public.*

**(Female 30+ Tirana)**

---

Climate change and global warming was, however, one of the most commonly mentioned global concerns by participants. Some focused on pollution as the most tangible example of the impact of environmental degradation on daily life, whereas others spoke more generally about its causes.

---

*Global warming comes from different aspects [...] car pollution, air pollution, pollution that comes from big farms. I was surprised that it was a huge part of global warming.*

**(Female 18-30 Tirana)**

---

A few older participants also directly cited observations about seasonal changes during their lifetime, resulting from rising global temperatures and fluctuations in previously predictable weather systems.

---

*I remember in Tirana 30 years ago that we had four seasons and the weather was very typical for each of them, for example, the winter was very cold. Now it is totally different.*

**(Male 30+ Tirana)**

---

It was, however, suggested by a younger man from Tirana that there was a generational gap in understanding on climate. This was partly driven by language, with younger people often more able to speak English, and thus more knowledgeable about climate change and global warming than older generations in Albania. This implied that information on or key terminology about climate change was often exclusively in English, which also interacts with other demographic divides, such as whether individuals live in urban or rural areas, or their level of educational attainment. In addition, although younger people in Albania seemed to be more aware, it was deemed to not be the equivalent to awareness among young people in other European countries.

This may be due to more top-down political drive, easier access to information or more opportunity to address environmental issues as a result of greater economic stability.

---

*They [younger people] are aware, but not as much as their counterparts in other countries. I travelled to Milan six months ago and people were protesting for climate change.*

**(Female 18-30 Tirana)**

---

At the time of the FGDs, awareness of climate change had been heightened through international news coverage of fires in the Amazon rainforest.

---

*When I think about the media, I don't remember any news about global warming, only news about the forest in Brazil; the burning of the Amazon.*

**(Male 18-30 Tirana)**

---

Consequentially, an older man in Shkodra pointed out the potential of online media to mobilise global action, as had been the case with coverage of the Amazon fires and the destruction of the 'lungs of the world.'

---

*When the forest was burning in the Amazon and the media was talking about burning the lungs of the world, of course we all got scared[...]the entire world was mobilised to turn off the fire and the media was broadcasting online what was happening there.*

**(Male 30+ Shkodra)**

---

However, many commented that even though there was some coverage of this topic, overall there is both limited reporting on climate change in the media and a lack of educational information for the general public on the subject. This limited understanding was then linked with a perception amongst older participants of an under-performing education system in Albania.

---

*We do not have a specialised centre to get that information. I think we are not informed enough.*

**(Female 30+ Shkodra)**

---

*I think we know what is going on, but it's not that we have a lot of information. I said it before that the last news we had about global warming is the news we had about the forest in the Amazon, I don't know when it happened and from that moment, I don't know anything else [...] the media is giving attention to other things.*

**(Female 18-30 Tirana)**

As a consequence of poor media coverage and a lack of information, many turned to social media, potentially exposing them to dis or misinformation.

---

*I do not have enough information about global warming. It's a form of information we get mostly from social media. The melting of ice, the raising of sea levels, [cutting down] trees.*

**(Male 18-30 Shkodra)**

---

Connecting back to the local concerns expressed, there was also a sense that while many had awareness of the issue, most had more pressing issues to face, such as unemployment and financial stresses.

---

*Because they [people] have a lot of other issues, they might not get concerned. They are more concerned about their daily life.*

**(Male 18-30 Shkodra)**

---

*I think climate change is skipped over because people here are concerned about issues that affect their lives directly.*

**(Male 30+ Shkodra)**

---

Finally, when asked a wider question about whose responsibility it was to address climate change and global warming, many still emphasised that, despite personal difficulties, it was everyone's responsibility to take action because everyone contributed to the problem. Suggested measures to make change were to reduce car usage and increase recycling efforts, drawing upon successful initiatives introduced elsewhere.

---

*For example, the Government can put some laws to stop the use of certain types of fuels for cars that are outdated [...] European countries like Germany and Italy [...] have specific days when they don't use cars because they have to lower the air pollution levels. Here in Albania, that has never been discussed.*

**(Male 18-30 Tirana)**

---

Responsibility for tackling climate change was also often understood as a political issue that the government had a duty to address through investment and legislation. It was felt that such legislation should be applied to industries using or producing unsustainable materials or products.

---

*The Government should invest more. They should enforce the laws. If the laws are OK, people would have to respect them.*

**(Female 30+ Shkodra)**

---

*I came to the conclusion that everything depends on politics because it is the government who should make some laws for big corporations to use eco-friendly products.*

**(Female 18-30 Tirana)**

---

Also key were the suggestions that tackling climate change was not something that Albania should address without larger countries leading the way, such as the USA, Russia and China.

---

*I think it is not the responsibility of Albania, but it is the responsibility of important countries such as China, the USA or Russia.*

**(Male 30+ Tirana)**

---

---

*When we say global warming, that means we say it is an issue that belongs to the whole world. If bigger countries are not respecting nature and cannot do anything to change this, what can Albania do?*

**(Male 30+ Shkodra)**

---

Overall, participants identified common concerns about life in Albania and although the media was described as providing coverage of issues such corruption, this did not lead to any change. Emigration and conflict were also common concerns, with participants from each group mentioning at least one of these topics, but at least one participant in each focus group also spoke about global warming, climate change and air pollution. It was shared that there was little information available for the general public and little media coverage to help them understand these issues. This was then related to a lack of incentive to engage with the topic, due to other issues perceived as more pressing, as well as a lack of policy or legal initiatives at the government level.

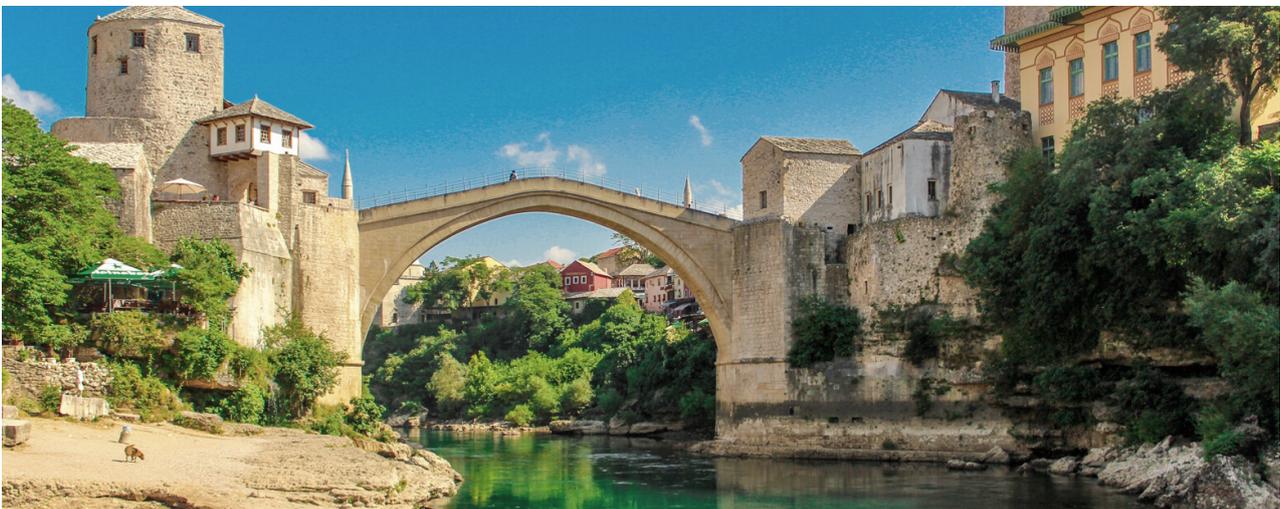
The view that climate change was strongly connected to politics was also demonstrated through suggestions that tackling the issue was not a problem that Albania should address. Rather, it should be larger countries like the USA, Russia and China who were perceived as more intrinsic to creating and leading on lasting change.

# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

---

In BiH, a total of eight focus groups were conducted across Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. In each of these locations, three focus groups per gender from the age group 18-30 were conducted with eight participants each - totalling 48 (24 women, 24 men). In Sarajevo, two focus groups were also conducted with those aged 31 or over, each with eight participants (16 in total, eight men and eight women).

A number of common local concerns emerged across all the discussions. As with Albania, unemployment was linked to young people leaving the country and thus causing detrimental brain drain. The political situation in BiH was raised by many and included negative views on the country's lack of freedom of speech, lack of change in response to challenges, and the inability to resolve differences and improve the economic situation.



Mostar, BiH

---

*I think that for the biggest problems, the two are connected; there is a big unemployment percentage and departure of young people, even older ones, entire families from the country.*  
**(Male 30+ Sarajevo)**

---

*About politics, I don't know what to say. For many years things have been trying to change, but eventually it all ends up the same. We are also economically where we are, while they actually care about who sits where and from which party [...] this is obviously self-interest.*  
**(Male 18-30 Banja Luka)**

---

The problem of corruption, including bribery, nepotism and a lack of recognition of workers' rights was raised, as well as general prejudice towards others based on ethnic difference, nationalism, religious identity or sexual orientation.

At the time of the focus group, Sarajevo had recently hosted its first Pride event. This was both welcomed by younger female participants from Sarajevo but noted as a source of tension and misreporting in the media due to a lack of tolerance. There was also specific reference to remaining tensions related to the war between 1992 and 1995.

---

*We have prejudice and fear of the unknown in our country. People will have prejudice about others, no matter if it's sexual orientation, nationalism, religion or anything. And after all these years, after the war in Bosnia, there is still this division of 'us' and 'them'.*

**(Female 18-30 Banja Luca)**

---

Many participants also expressed concern about the overall poor quality of life and low standard of living in BiH. This included low quality health care, low wages, poor quality education and a belief amongst some that 'life was better in the old days,' particularly amongst older men from Banja Luca. The media tended to exacerbate these local concerns at the expense of positivity. Negative media coverage contributed to a negative perception of young people and life in BiH and thus influenced their aspirations to leave. Global concerns echoed the local and included wider socio-economic insecurity, conflict, political instability, poverty, power imbalances, and the unfair distribution of wealth. When considering the influence of media coverage on any of these issues, one older man from Sarajevo described his perception of how global power, rather than truth, was expressed through the media.

---

*The powers of the world present their power through the media that is available to us through Facebook or whatever [...] whether this is true or not true, something is for sure [...] we know part of the truth.*

**(Male 30+ Sarajevo)**

---

Importantly, participants in all but one group mentioned climate change, global warming, and environmental related issues as key global concern.

It was associated with a range of factors including shifting glaciers, ocean pollution, changing seasonal patterns, rising sea levels, global warming, animal extinction and poorer quality farming. Many referred to direct examples from personal experience or observation.

---

*Here in our country too, the climate is not normal. Everything has shifted. We have neither spring or autumn, we have winter and summer, and that's it.*

**(Female 30+ Sarajevo)**

---

*I plant my own food, as many people here do. You can notice certain changes as years pass by. You can see how it gets more difficult to harvest some food.*

**(Male 18-30 Mostar)**

---

*In the summer we have more rain than usual, it's not good for the people who live here because they can have a disease and hospitals don't have enough space for everyone.*

**(Female 18-30 Mostar)**

---

One younger male from Sarajevo shared his view that he was not fully informed about climate change because information was hidden under pressure from groups and organisations protecting their own interests. This perspective was also shared by a younger man from Mostar who stated:

---

*I believe it is an issue that we do not know enough about. I think it is again about money and power, rather than making people aware of the issue.*

**(Male 18-30 Mostar)**

---

There was also a strong sense amongst participants that people in BiH have more significant and immediate problems to address.

---

*I think we have bigger problems than climate change, we think about how to make ends meet every month, how to feed children, how to survive and live day by day here.*

**(Female 18-30 Mostar)**

---

*I do not think climate change is a big issue. I consider economic inequality to be a bigger issue.*

**(Male 18-30 Mostar)**

---

For some, climate change was listed as a top priority because of the extent of the damage to the planet. However, a lack of engagement was attributed and related to a general apathy among young people in BiH. It was also stated by younger participants that older generations were less likely to know anything about climate change. Therefore, while young people may be better informed, the majority did not care due to the need to focus on other priorities. Related to generational differences, one older woman in Sarajevo described it being too late for her generation to change the way they lived, and rather emphasis should be placed on teaching children to live differently.

---

*Generally, these next generations should be raised to speak about it [climate change]. Let's try to direct them not to live the way we live. I think there is not any general help for us.*

**(Female 30+ Sarajevo)**

---

Media coverage on the negative impacts of climate change was perceived as being selective. Most information was only available from international websites dedicated to the topic, while local media sources were described as barely covering the issue.

One young woman from Banja Luca described herself as an activist who was involved with the Center for Environmental Protection. She highlighted that people often did not engage with an issue until there was a significant event or catastrophe that raised awareness. Examples were shared of environmental issues in the country such as algae proliferation in the Vrbas, unsafe drinking water, and the unsustainable sale of natural water resources for hydro-electric power plants. These issues were not widely covered in the media due to the perception that they are not of public interest, but also likely due to political and commercial pressures.

When asked about who or what they thought was responsible for causing climate change, participants focused on a variety of sources, including fossil fuel consumption, plastic usage, intensive meat farming practices, and the actions of big corporations or heavy industry. When asked what participants thought could be done to tackle climate change, a number of suggestions were given, ranging from the individual behaviours that could be adopted through to the enactment of state level policies and regulations.

---

*I think the biggest fault is with big corporations and industries. They must be stopped, and they need to get some regulations, through citizen petitions or state policies.*

**(Female 18-30 Banja Luca)**

---

*These little things we can do, from not using plastic, not driving a car in every situation; we can all plant a tree. It is clear how much oxygen one tree produces.*

**(Female 30+ Sarajevo)**

---

For individual behaviours to be effective, it was recognised that they would need to be adopted by millions of people. It was also felt that the media, politicians, and the government have an important role to play in raising awareness and understanding of the issue and motivating the public. However, it was also felt that the impact on climate change from people's efforts in BiH would be minimal when compared with the activities of more significant polluters, suggested to be China and the United States.

---

*A lot of pollution is from Africa and from the old plants in China [...] from the USA comes about 50% of pollution.*

**(Male 18-30 Banja Luca)**

---

When asked to think about communications, activities and messages that could be effective for raising awareness and addressing climate change in BiH, participants suggested the following:

---

*We can motivate people, let's say to recycle. We can pay them to bring their own plastic bottles.*

**(Male 18-30 Mostar)**

---

*I think we should focus more on local communities, what is the point of talking about the situation in the Amazon. We should start from ourselves.*

**(Male 18-30 Mostar)**

---

Some suggested that there was a need to scare people into action so the issue of climate change would cut through the concerns and challenges that people face on a day to day basis.

---

*I think we need to scare people based on all the issues we have in our country. We need to have something big otherwise you won't get attention.*

**(Female 18-30 Mostar)**

---

Instagram was suggested as an effective platform for raising awareness amongst young people, with a younger male participant from Banja Luca describing how his friends in Sarajevo had started an Instagram account to promote how to protect the environment which had reached many young people. This included giving young people proactive messaging about what they could do in their local communities. Facebook was also seen as a platform where positive news stories on and around climate action could be posted in order to celebrate successes and inspire others.

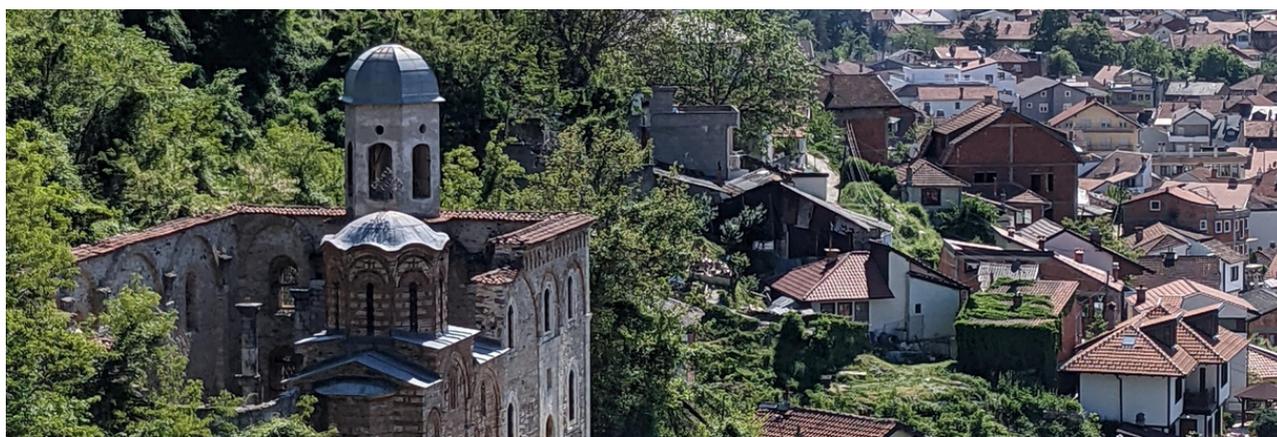
To summarise, across all focus groups, a number of common local and global concerns: unemployment, migration, prejudice, low standards of living, insecurity and conflict. It was suggested that, in some cases, certain issues were exacerbated by the media, while in others, the media only informed listeners/readers partially of the truth. Participants in all but one group mentioned climate change, global warming and environment and pollution related issues as key problems, but there was a strong sense that people in BiH have bigger and more immediate concerns to address. Media coverage was perceived as being selective and insufficient, with most information coming from international sources. Despite this, participants were keen to share ideas of how they had or would enact change, particularly through social media.

# KOSOVO

---

In Kosovo, mass surveying was used to contact 404 individuals. Participants were split equally between men and women, 18-30 year olds and 31-60+ year olds, and urban to rural residency. For local concerns in Kosovo participants were provided with a range of options, from diminishing education levels, brain drain, and politics, to health, pollution, insecurity and marginalisation. Concerns were primarily centred on economic opportunities (64% chose 'unemployment'), corruption (43%), the political situation (35%), and health related concerns (both related (39%) and non-related to COVID-19 (37%)).

The economy (33%) and brain drain (30%) were also concerns, tying into the previous areas mentioned. COVID-19 had also exacerbated pre-existing concerns, with job losses, lockdowns, increased government authority to control the pandemic, and children taken out of school affecting many. Issues such as the marginalisation of minorities, immigration, and extremism were, comparatively, chosen less by participants. Air pollution and environmental issues were chosen by 9% and 6% of respondents respectively. All of these areas were more of a priority than the media and fake news, with this subject only comprising 4% of responses.



*Prizren, Kosovo*

Older participants were generally more concerned about health, unemployment, the political situation, brain drain, and diminishing education levels, though the differences between the age groups on local concerns were relatively minimal. Differences between urban and rural respondents were more varied, as those from urban areas were significantly more concerned about brain drain and diminishing education levels than those in rural areas.

Urban respondents were also more concerned about health (other than COVID-19), possibly reflecting the impact of air pollution on those in cities and towns. Health was also a slightly greater concern for those in the 31-60+ category, reflecting anxieties about the healthcare system and living conditions. Women were also generally much more concerned about nearly all issues than men, particularly COVID-19, the environment, diminishing education levels, unemployment, and corruption.

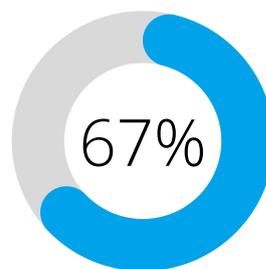
For global concerns, COVID-19 was the greatest issue (57%), and particularly for women. This was followed more generally by poverty (37%), hunger (29%), terrorism (25%), climate change (23%) and growing hate/segregation (21%). Women were generally more concerned about all these top issues, particularly poverty, terrorism, growing hate and segregation, and climate change. Male respondents were more concerned about migration, pollution, and ethnic divisions in proportion to female respondents in these categories. Many also selected 'other', though crime and hunger were also popular concerns for respondents when thinking on a global scale.

Rural participants were more concerned about COVID-19, poverty, hunger and significantly, climate change. The latter is potentially because the effects of this are already being felt in rural areas due to shifting seasons and extreme weather patterns, resulting in flooding, landslides, and poor produce yields. Urban participants on the other hand were more concerned on a global level with religious division, global politics, global insecurity and conflict. This may be because urban areas are often the places where human-driven conflict or social tensions are most immediately and directly felt.

A significant number of younger participants chose the 'other' option and were overall more concerned about terrorism, religious and ethnic divisions, global politics, global insecurity, and conflict than older respondents. Their concerns with these issues may be because they feel the direct effect of neighbouring conflict on their economic opportunities, or fear the reignition of conflict due to ethnic, religious or political tensions within the region.

There may also be a sense of hopelessness among young people to deal with these larger problems versus other more immediate concerns around career and employment opportunities.

When asked specifically about climate change,



of all respondents stated 'yes', they were concerned about climate change

Participants were also asked to explain why/why not by selecting a first and second reason from the following options. The responses were then coded by the in-country research team into the following categories:

1. Impact on health
2. Causing natural disasters
3. Affects climate change/changing seasons
4. Air pollution
5. Lack of atmospheric precipitation
6. Rising temperatures
7. Melting glaciers/raising water levels
8. Environmental issues/Environment pollution
9. Species extinction
10. Affects atmospheric conditions/weather
11. Humidity
12. Destruction of nature
13. Loss of ecosystem
14. The hand of God
15. No cause for concern/Nothing has changed
16. We have no influence, it is a global issue
17. Doesn't concern me
18. Don't know

Those from the 31-60+ age group were more concerned about global warming and climate change than younger respondents, though the majority of younger respondents did respond 'yes' to the binary option. However, unlike in a previous question where more rural than urban respondents chose global warming/climate change out of a list of potential global concerns, more urban respondents chose 'yes' to the more direct binary question. It may be that climate change takes precedent over other issues for rural respondents when presented with multiple options, or that others are more mobilised to speak out about it when it is directly addressed.

When asked why they would or wouldn't be concerned about climate change, most participants felt they did not know (28% for first response) and far fewer provided a second response overall. This potentially reflects poor access to information or media coverage on the topic. For those that did choose a category, the impact on health (17% for first choice, 20% for second), the change of seasons (7% and 9%), air pollution (6% and 23%), and the loss of ecosystems (7%) were the primary concerns. However, 10% still stated that there was 'no cause for concern/nothing has changed'. For the first response, a larger number 18-30 year olds stated they didn't know, that it didn't concern them, or that 'we have no influence, it is a global issue'. However, younger respondents were more concerned overall with environmental pollution, air pollution, and melting glaciers/rising water levels. Overwhelmingly, the older age group were concerned about the impact on health, likely reflecting wider anxieties around health due to the pandemic.

For the first choice rural participants were largely split between 'don't know', 'impact on health', and 'no cause for concern/nothing has changed'. Those from urban areas were understandably concerned with air pollution and environmental pollution, alongside changing seasons, natural disasters, the destruction of nature, and the loss of ecosystems. The results suggest that while there is awareness in rural areas, concern is generally circulated around a limited set of issues (primarily the impact on health) or respondents do not know the specific reasons why they should be concerned despite feeling the effects.

For the second choice, the 31-60+ age group chose more options overall within the questions' categories and focused on air pollution, natural disasters, rising temperatures, humidity, and the impact on health as main points of concern. Younger respondents who answered this second question spread their responses across multiple areas, though effects on atmospheric conditions, environmental pollution, and rising water levels were chosen only by this demographic. Urban respondents were also concerned once again about air pollution and humidity in their second response, as well as the impact on health, while rural respondents spread their second option answers across all 11 categories. Reflecting previous trends, women overall were more concerned about the various effects of climate change on differing areas. The impact on health and air pollution stood out as both first and second choices, with natural disasters, melting glaciers, environmental pollution, and humidity comprising the majority of second choice responses.

More men than women tended to disregard climate change stating that nothing had changed or it was not of concern, it was the hand of god, or that they had no influence because it was a global problem. However, some were still concerned about the impact on health, loss of ecosystems, species extinction, rising water levels, and particularly environmental pollution. For the second choice, more men also chose changing seasons, lack of atmospheric precipitation, and rising temperatures, potentially reflecting

patterns of employment in jobs dependent on stable natural systems. Overall, women are generally much more engaged on climate related issues and are concerned about its long-term consequences across a variety of issues related to ecological decline and worsening food and health security. For the male respondents, while some acknowledged that climate change was an issue, some denied its existence while others felt that it was a less pressing problem versus other more immediate areas of concern.

## MONTENEGRO

---

As with Kosovo, mass surveys were also used in Montenegro with 1,008 participants providing feedback. 51.5% of respondents were male and 48.5% of respondents were female. Respondents ranged in age between 18-88, with an average (mean) age of 42.

When grouped by age, 31% of respondents fell into the 18-30 year old category and 69% fell into the 31-60+ year old category. When asked what type of settlement respondents live in, 65% said urban and 35% said rural.



*Budva, Montenegro*

When asked about local concerns, More than half of respondents cited COVID-19 (57%) and unemployment (56%) as their top concerns about life in Montenegro, with the economy (47%) the third most common choice. There are clear connections between these, with the effects of COVID-19 having an impact on unemployment rates, job security, and

the state of the economy. Corruption was also a common concern, cited by nearly half of respondents (46%), followed by 24% who were concerned about the political situation in Montenegro. All of these areas were more of a priority than the media and fake news, with this subject only comprising 6% of responses.



Open-ended responses included the following, detailing further individuals' concerns about their environment. Specific mention of heavy industries and COVID-19 in relation to environmental degradation demonstrated the prevalence of these observable sources of concern for Montenegrins and their subsequent connection to wider existential threats.

---

*As a citizen of Montenegro, of course I am concerned about my health and the health of the people who are important to me, and of course my people with whom I live in my country. I think climate change is affecting our lives.*

**(Male 18-30 Rural)**

---

*I am worried because in my opinion the human factor is the main culprit for climate change; with the development of industry we are slowly losing nature and natural subjects.*

**Male 30+ Urban**

---

*I am very worried, the climate is changing as well as the ecosystem and the environment and we are all responsible for that. It is no wonder that some viruses and diseases are appearing, mostly because of this.*

**Female 30+ Urban**

---

*I am worried because nature is being ruined and to a large extent man's attitude towards nature is the main culprit. Factories, cars, planes, ships and all these factors pollute nature and all this affects climate change [...] climate change affects nature and natural processes, and natural processes affect the life and health of all of us.*

**(Female 30+ Rural)**

---

*I am worried because we are losing natural resources with the advancement of human inventions, oxygen levels are declining, weather conditions are changing and the ecosystem is being disrupted.*

**Male 30+ Urban**

---

Some participants were also able to provide specific examples from personal or friends' experiences.

---

*For example in my town, Ada Bojana began to disappear, the Adriatic sea is taking it away.*

**(Female 30+ Urban)**

---

*I have a friend, he is a farmer and he says that members of his family say that the soil has changed as an effect of the climate changing; the fruits are not growing as in the past.*

**Male 18-30 Urban**

---

For those who said they were not concerned about climate change, the most common reason was that they don't know or don't understand enough about the subject, connecting to a lack of credible or trusted information circulating widely within public discourse. Other common responses included the belief that climate change would not affect them personally; that they do not care, or that they do not believe in it/that climate change is fake news.

---

*According to my research, I came to the conclusion that the earth goes through cycles of cooling and warming which is absolutely normal. Climate change is exaggerated and a big fuss is being made about it.*

**(Male 18-30 Urban)**

---

*I am not concerned, what we can do about that as individuals?*

**(Female 30+ Rural)**

---

*I am not concerned because we can't feel the consequences of global warming.*

**(Female 30+ Rural)**

---

Others stated that while they may be concerned, there was little they could do as individuals. Economic pressures, the need to gain an education to compete for limited opportunities, and other more immediate concerns took precedent, particularly for young people.

---

*I don't know, I don't think about that; school is my priority.*

**(Female 18-30 Urban)**

---

*Poverty is a far greater problem. Only rich countries speak about climate change.*

**(Male 18-30 Rural)**

---

Male respondents were also slightly more likely than female respondents to disregard climate change as fake news or disinformation in the open-ended questions, or believe that the problem was exaggerated by scientists and the media. This attitude may be either consciously or unconsciously driven by gender norms, and the differing pressures and thus prioritisation of certain issues between men and women - more research needs to be done to explore this connection further. The anonymity of the surveys also potentially allowed for some to express more controversial or dismissive views than they might do during a focus group discussion,

In summary, attitudes towards climate change in Montenegro reflected those of the other Western Balkans countries, with tensions existing for respondents between what could and couldn't be believed in the media and online discourse; as well as the challenges for young people to prioritise differing socio-economic pressures. The sense of being left behind in conversations about climate change as well as feeling of powerlessness to enact change as individuals, as well as on a national level, inhibited many individuals' ability to engage or take action.

Climate change was, however, recognised as a significant issue, with many already observing the effects of shifting precipitation levels and other changes to seasonal atmospheric conditions. There was no significant split between rural and urban participants among those who were concerned, demonstrating how the varying impacts of climate change equally concerned those in cities and towns as well as the country side, but often due to differing reasons. Due to COVID-19, health-related concerns were also strongly linked to anxieties about the changing climate and human impact on the natural world.

# NORTH MACEDONIA

---

In total, 48 individuals participated in focus group discussions in Skopje: 32 between the ages of 18 and 30 (16 female, 16 male), and 16 aged 31 or over (8 male and 8 female).

Participants expressed a range of concerns about life in North Macedonia. Most commonly mentioned in all groups were concerns about the environment and air pollution, particularly in the capital. Another significant concern was unemployment and the impact of emigration from the country as causing

brain drain and depriving the country of young people with the skills and expertise needed for the country to prosper. In addition, specific references were made to the poor health system and hygiene standards.

---

*We all share the same opinions. The pollution is catastrophic, the unemployment and young people moving out has grown bigger from one year to another [...] The medical conditions are disastrous and there's a high rate of corruption. That's my opinion.*

**(Female 18-30 Skopje)**

---



Mavro National Park, North Macedonia

---

*For me, basically it's the rule of law. Everything is connected to it.*

**(Female 30+ Skopje)**

---

*Inter-ethnic conflict and everything about politics. I think it's terrible. There are two political parties that are the worst. It's one or the other. You think there are more choices but there aren't.*

**(Female 18-30 Skopje)**

---

Lack of the effective rule of law, political manipulation (often based on the inflammation of inter-ethnic conflict), and corruption were all seen as contributing to current tensions. Additional concerns raised included integration with the EU, a lack of mental health support services, literacy levels, the education system, health care, domestic violence, women's rights, a lack of support for disabled people, and poor animal welfare.

Participants were asked to share up to three global concerns that they had about the world in general and then share them during the group discussions. Common themes emerged, including climate change and pollution, natural disasters, poverty, nuclear capabilities and potential conflict. Migration and terrorism were also mentioned, along with concerns about the conflict in Syria and a potential conflict with Iran. An older male participant discussed his concern about the link between climate change, consumerism and potential world conflict, further connecting this to a negative perception of American hegemonic power.

---

*[When discussing climate change] It's all connected to world war three. The consumer and the economic system leading to planet devastation. So, at this point, the American hegemony [sic] are trying to force their power on the world, being in Iran, and maybe it will lead to a war and we'll have another disaster then.*  
**(Male 30+ Skopje)**

---

Climate change was also connected with other fears around employment and opportunities. Many, in referencing climate change, cited international rather than local sources for their information.

---

*[I am concerned about] my future career and profession. It's something that worries me a lot [...] Then, both climate change and environmental destruction. Also, the climate crisis because the newspaper The Guardian has already declared they would use 'climate crisis' instead of 'climate change'.*  
**(Female 18-30 Skopje)**

They then reflected further on topics and themes that they felt did not receive enough coverage in the media in general, including on the radio, television, in print and on social media. Themes and topics given by participants largely matched the topics they are concerned about in North Macedonia and the world more generally. From a domestic perspective it was felt that the air pollution in Skopje did not receive enough coverage, particularly in the summer when, although it cannot be seen, it was likely still there. Information about changes to the education system was not given enough coverage, leading to people being uninformed about reforms and the frequent changes made. While the media provided coverage of debates related to national policies, for example on young people emigrating, government action was perceived as lacking.

---

*I think that the brain drain is not getting enough coverage, just because the scale on which it is happening has not been researched enough; it's actually a lot more than everybody thinks. And globally, I think that global warming and ecological change should be given more attention.*  
**(Male 18-30 Skopje)**

---

*We had debates about the problems, but we don't have any results for national policies. Very much about the brain drain process, about young people, but the actions that are taken by the Government [...] are not enough.*  
**(Male 18-30 Skopje)**

Local media was also perceived as being under pressure with the threat of closure if they do something perceived as improper. A number of mentions were made about the media's thematic content, with concern that there was not enough coverage of science (including climate change), culture, and local music:

---

*We don't have many documentaries about tradition in different parts in North Macedonia. We are a small country, but for example, we don't know what people in Berovo are doing or they don't know what people in Struga are doing.*

**(Male 18-30 Skopje)**

---

Other participants echoed the need for a more positive and proactive media to celebrate North Macedonian culture, which may incentivise people to engage more in local initiatives and emotionally invest in their environment.

---

*I think we need more information about the culture. Everything revolves around politics or pollution, but we need more information about the culture. I mean museums, I mean music.*

**(Female 30+ Skopje)**

---

*I miss information about the region and the world in general. We are consumed and the media is treating us like we're a country in a vacuum, in a bubble. The climate change as well, and I miss science in the media. There is not enough information about any type of scientific acknowledgements or whatever else and I agree with the [other points made about] culture and art as well.*

**(Female 30+ Skopje)**

---

*Global warming and climate change is not very often covered in the media.*

**(Female 18-30 Skopje)**

---

It was also suggested that there is limited educational content in the Macedonian language, with the majority of search engine (Google) use conducted in English. Another issue raised regarding the media was a lack of high-quality production value in North Macedonian TV stations, and the lack of production of their own shows. In contrast to this, Al Jazeera Balkans was mentioned as having their own shows with excellent production.

---

*Most of the TV stations don't produce TV shows, their own shows [...] Al Jazeera Balkans, they have excellent production and have their own shows. Our TV stations buy some Turkish TV soap operas; there is no production, no discussion.*

**(Male 18-30 Skopje)**

---

In North Macedonia, an unhealthy information and media environment was therefore strongly linked with a variety of other concerns, including global warming, climate change, and particularly air pollution. The need for more comprehensive coverage, including on a local level, was emphasised to encourage people to be proud of and invest in their local environment. In addition, improving media and reporting practises as well as media independence from political influence was seen as an important step in making people trust information. This step is therefore also key for how information about climate change is or can be circulated.

# SERBIA

---

The focus group discussions in Serbia were split between Belgrade and Novi Sad, and totalled 64 participants, 32 male and 32 female, and 32 each from the two target locations. In Belgrade, 16 were aged between 18-30 and 16 aged 31 or over. 16 of the participants were female and 16 male. The same formula was taken in Novi Sad.

In Serbia, worries about emigration, brain-drain and young people's futures were mentioned by participants in all focus groups. There was a high level of concern that young educated people faced limited opportunities pursuing a career in their country and so were forced to consider emigrating in search of better prospects.



Belgrade, Serbia

When talking about living standards, one younger man from Belgrade suggested that the ruling party presented a much more positive picture than reality, as did media organisations that supported the government. Linked with corruption was concern about the education system and corrupt practises for acquiring academic credentials from universities. This included cases reported in the media of politicians misrepresenting their academic achievements by using fake credentials.

---

*I think they presented a much lower number than it really is.*

**(Male 30+ Novi Sad)**

---

---

*It's about unemployment in Serbia; young people leaving from the country for the better opportunities [...] I have at least 70% of my friends who have left abroad for better opportunities.*

**(Male 30+ Belgrade)**

---

Another common concern shared in all groups related to the political situation in the country. Specifically, misrepresentation by the government of progress that is being made and concern about elections not being free. Unemployment, another common concern, was connected to this.

There was a perception that government supporting media under-reported the number of young people that were leaving the country due to emigration.

Health care in Serbia was also raised. One younger woman from Novi Sad who worked in a hospital described how people were having to wait up to eight months to see a doctor and Serbia had poor cancer survival rates compared with other European countries.

---

*The health system is very bad, state hospitals [...] I know that you must wait for about 6 to 8 months to see any doctor. Many people died because of cancer or similar diseases.*

**(Female 18-30 Novi Sad)**

---

Younger men from Belgrade raised an overall concern about the state of the media in their country, including political partisanship and the potential of the media to manipulate opinions and create tension related to Croatia and Kosovo. Similar concerns about the media and the dissemination of fake news and misinformation related to politics was raised by older women from Novi Sad.

---

*Media is a very important [issue] and have a crucial role in many aspects, controlling masses amongst other things. And that is especially obvious when we compare media reporting Serbia and Croatia.*

**(Male 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

For global concerns, many mentioned conflict and migration as key areas. Migration was not perceived as a focus of media attention because Serbia was a transit country and not the intended destination for migrants. However, younger men in Belgrade were concerned that immigration was connected with fears of terrorism and intolerance, particularly towards the Muslim community.

They went on to suggest that the media had a role in building tolerance by bringing together different cultures and ethnic groups. Older women from Belgrade raised a concern about the rise of right-wing populism, which was linked with Serbia's conflict in the 1990s.

---

*The first one [of concern] is authoritarianism, it's like a far-right movement and this is designed to be not so friendly and opened to the migrants, for example, or to the people from third world countries.*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

Global warming and climate change were raised as global concerns, with specific mention of related themes including ecology, pollution, sustainable development and natural resource management. Although the majority of participants expressed this, there were a small number who differed. One older man from Belgrade, for example, explained that he did not think that a problem with global warming existed and that it was made up. Any change in climate or related phenomena was part of the natural changes that the planet goes through over time.

---

*I think that there doesn't exist the problem of global warming - that it's a made-up problem. I also think that global warming is just a type of oscillation [...] that Earth would experience with or without us.*

**(Male 30+ Belgrade)**

Another man from the same group commented that it was hard to know the truth when people have different opinions about the topic. Related to this was a sense that fake news denying global warming served to protect the liberal world from addressing the problem.

---

*It is really hard for me to interpret what is true [...] there are so many different opinions.*

**(Male 30+ Belgrade)**

---

*I think that all fake news that global warming doesn't exist is just a way of protecting the liberal world from their responsibilities.*

**(Male 30+ Belgrade)**

---

One younger woman from Belgrade described what she felt was a manipulative discourse that is being played out that lays the blame for climate change at the feet of individuals when the root of the problem lays in capitalist systems.

---

*The problem is much greater than that. It's not if I stop using plastic [...] capitalism and the whole consumerism system should be changed.*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

When asked to share what they know about climate change, younger men from both Novi Sad and Belgrade described links between climate change and global warming and the negative impact of these on food production and pollution.

Similarly, an older man from Novi Sad described how the changing seasonal weather impacted agricultural production

and livelihoods because growing crops was harder without using chemicals. He went on to explain that the consequential impact of increased chemical usage on polluting drinking water sources.

---

*That is a serious problem for agriculture. The autumn is no longer appropriate for those crops that used to be sown in that period [...] so those who work in the field have to add a lot of chemicals to have at least some successful products to sell.*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

Other negative observed impacts associated with climate change included changing weather patterns and seasons, pollution and respiratory problems, floods, natural disasters and the extinction of plants and animals.

---

*We have no more fall and spring, we get it [the seasonal change] instantly, like it was in November when we had 29 degrees and recently we have had 2 degrees.*

**(Female 30+ Belgrade)**

---

*We have an amazing example from three weeks ago. For the first time that I can remember in Belgrade, the air was so polluted that you couldn't breathe.*

**(Female 30+ Belgrade)**

---

It was also suggested that there was a generational divide between younger and older people in their level of concern about climate change and its impacts. The suggested reason for this was that older people were more likely to be struggling to live day to day and were thus less focused on wider issues in the world.

---

*Younger generations yes, but older, no. My parents for example, who are in their fifties, do not care about global warming. I think all of us [younger people] are more concerned. I think the reason for that is that old people live day for day; they have many problems and their thoughts are focused on how to survive.*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

When asked who was responsible for addressing climate change, participants shared a range of stakeholders including the G7 nations, governments, and global institutions, politicians, corporations, factories, the nuclear industry and civil society.

---

*I would say more big corporations, big factories and nuclear reactors [...] I mean we are responsible also, but I can collect all the plastic in the world, but if they keep emitting gases in the atmosphere I am not doing much.*

**(Female 18-30 Novi Sad)**

---

One older man from Novi Sad described how he felt climate change was rooted in the way that powerful economies in the world had developed.

---

*I think that those powerful economies of the world, USA and Europe, in their development made such a devastating harm and then they realised that they should slow down and think more about nature. However, countries like China, India and Russia are new developing economies and they do not want to stop.*

**(Male 30+ Novi Sad)**

---

There was a sense amongst older women in Novi Sad that the Serbian government was not considering climate change when making policy decisions.

When asked whether there was anything that participants were doing themselves to tackle climate change, one younger woman from Belgrade raised her concern that it was difficult for individuals to do anything that would make a difference when people were not aware of the importance of tackling climate change. It was also suggested awareness was even lower in rural areas.

---

*In Cacak, there's a lot of agricultural, rural type of economy and families are mostly concerned with that kind of work [...] they didn't know what global warming is. They live their life and that's great, but they are not widely aware of consequences.*

**(Male 30+ Novi Sad)**

---

Individual efforts shared by participants for tackling climate change included re-using plastic bags, becoming vegan, avoiding car use and using recycling bins when they were available. The use of recycling bins was considered ineffective though because they were either not used properly or the facilities for recycling materials were inadequate.

---

*So, in the airport we have these recycling bins, but recycling does not exist here. You put your plastic in the recycling bin for plastic but the recycling industry for plastic does not exist in Serbia.*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

*There was some trial period in my street [...] and people just brought all their garbage and put it in one [bin].*

**(Female 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

One younger man from Belgrade shared that he was involved in organising a green festival in Belgrade that provided a platform for environmental and conservation efforts.

---

*We have a film, an educational and official programme, and we engage kids from elementary school up to 9 years old. And through that programme we have examples that children teach parents about good manners in ecological conservation [...] buying led lights, reducing waste or eating less meat.*

**(Male 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

Suggested approaches for tackling climate change included creating government change through protest movements. This included reference to climate campaigner Greta Thunberg and recent climate protests. It was also suggested that individual efforts for tackling climate change would be effective if they included sanctions, such as taxing people for car use. There was also a perceived need to educate people, so they were better equipped to understand the consequences of pollution.

---

*The answer to everything is education. If you have a good quality education, you will create people who think critically [...] [provide] education to the population on the negative aspects of polluting rivers.*

**(Female 30+ Belgrade)**

---

When asked what communication messages and activities may be effective for raising awareness and understanding of climate change, it was suggested that the media had an important role to play in disseminating information. Younger men from Belgrade highlighted the importance of media in education and, such as through TV programmes, billboards and news coverage to reach a large audience. In addition to educating people about climate change, it was also suggested messages should include actions that people can take to tackle the issue.

---

*Widespread education in any way possible, news, TV, billboards [...] connected to that is not just educate but give them tools.*

**(Male 18-30 Belgrade)**

---

It was suggested that awareness amongst older people could be raised through communication messages that placed emphasis on the type of world that their grandchildren would be living in due to the consequences of climate change.

---

*Maybe you can appeal to them [older people] through their grandchildren, like what kind of the world they are leaving to their children and grandchildren.*

**(Female 18-30 Novi Sad)**

---

Social media posts on Facebook and Instagram were suggested as a good way for communications to reach young people. One younger man from Novi Sad recalled the message 'Think Global, Act Local' which the group agreed had the potential to engage if it was connected with real-world actions that would make a difference. Showing examples of how changing seasonal patterns had a negative impact on crop production was suggested to be more relevant for engaging rural audiences in understanding the consequences of climate change. This was because the topic was more relevant to their daily lives than it was for those living in urban areas. Overall, communications should therefore consider what will be most relevant for individual audience groups.

---

*It depends on which part of Serbia, because those in urban are thinking about what they are going to buy in the shop, when in rural areas they need to think about the weather.*

**(Male 30+ Novi Sad)**

---

## CONCLUSIONS

Across the region, climate change was considered a key concern by many. The observational effects of pollution, changing temperatures and extreme weather patterns have motivated many to begin engaging on this topic within both a local and global context. In addition, discussions within international media had further motivated individuals across the region to engage through exposure to global events or larger data trends. However, concerns about climate were always intrinsically connected with local concerns, whether mentioned explicitly by participants or not. Socio-economic instability and political uncertainty meant that many are unable to engage with climate change as actively as they would like and disenfranchisement at a local level extends to a sense of helplessness in participating in a cause that depends on ongoing co-operation between transnational, national and local institutions. In addition, chronic brain drain across the region means that young people in particular are de-incentivised to invest in their local environments and instead prioritise gaining skills that can serve them well when emigrating to other countries,

The media was mentioned by many as key to addressing the climate crisis, through the dissemination of information, awareness raising and more generally encouraging citizens to engage positively and proactively with national issues. However, distrust of the media generally was also related to distrust around information on climate change, particularly since local media coverage was often patchy, limited in scope, and only covered crisis incidents rather than wider conversations on the environment.

Despite this, participants were enthusiastic to suggest ways in which communications and the media could be used to raise awareness about environmental activities or climate issues. When addressing older people, focusing on the legacy left behind for the next generation was suggested as well as the need to translate climate-related information into local languages. The importance of demonstrating tangible examples of climate change on a local level was also mentioned to help make content relatable and explain why certain phenomena are being observed. In addition, the importance of engaging citizens in longer-term conversation around climate change and scientific topics more generally was articulated by participants in nearly all countries. This was in turn connected to the importance of strengthening the media as an educational tool as well as an informative one. Social media was regarded by many young people as the most fertile ground for the establishment of productive conversations around climate change as well as for awareness raising activities. However, social media was also acknowledged for its rampant mis and disinformation, and thus there is an ongoing challenge of balancing its utility and potential detriment.

A critical aspect to addressing climate change in the Western Balkans is thus the protection and strengthening of the information ecosystem. This is to provide a solid basis for civic and political engagement and to amplify, legitimise and explore the voices and experiences of those at a local level. Only then can solutions be created that account for the multi-faceted challenges presented by climate change.

Analysis and report written by Emily Hoyle, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Executive at Albany Associates.

Focus groups conducted by TDC Research LTD and Laura Nettleton, Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning at Albany Associates.

With thanks to our research partners DeFacto Consulting and Kantar (Index Kosova); and to our local partners the Albanian Media Institute, Mediacentar Sarajevo, KosovaLive, the Macedonian Institute for Media, the Montenegro Media Institute, and the Novi Sad School of Journalism.