

Indicators of the Quality of Workers Rights: Western Balkans in 2024

The following paragraphs provide an overview of key indicators regarding the quality of worker rights and decent work standards in the Western Balkans region. Initially, we will make three notes. First, when we talk about the Western Balkans, we are talking about seven legal frameworks that have their own labour legislation, and these are: Albania, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The second note concerns data availability. Name-

ly, not all data are equally available in all legal frameworks. Even when they are available, they may not refer to the same time periods. Third, research methodologies used in official statistics may vary across countries, so some data are not fully comparable. However, the available data allows us to present a general picture of the labour situation. We will continue to update this information as new data becomes available and make it available in the best possible form to all interested parties.

1. Employed & Unemployed

The Western Balkans region has a population of approximately 16.8 million, of which around 5.3 million are employed.

The unemployment rate is highest in North Macedonia (12.5%), highlighting a significant labor market challenge. On the other hand, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest unemployment rate (7.5%). The average unemployment rate across the region is 10.3%.

Country	Population (in millions)	Employed Persons (in millions)	Unemployment rate
Serbia	6.6	2.3	9.4%
B&H - Federation	2.2	0.55	7.5%
B&H - RS	1.2	0.29	9.3%
Albania	2.8	0.73	10.7%
North Macedonia	1.8	0.7	12.5%
Kosovo	1.6	0.425	10.9%
Montenegro	0.62	0.28	11.9%

2. Minimum Wage & Living Wage (2024)

Minimum wage levels across the region are relatively low. The average minimum wage in the region in 2024 was approximately €386. In 2024, Montenegro offered the highest minimum wage at €450, which increased to €600 for secondary school graduates and €800 for university graduates in November 2024. However, even in Montenegro, the minimum wage falls short when compared to the living wage, which is significantly higher. The discrepancy suggests that the minimum wage in the region does not fully support workers in covering their basic needs.

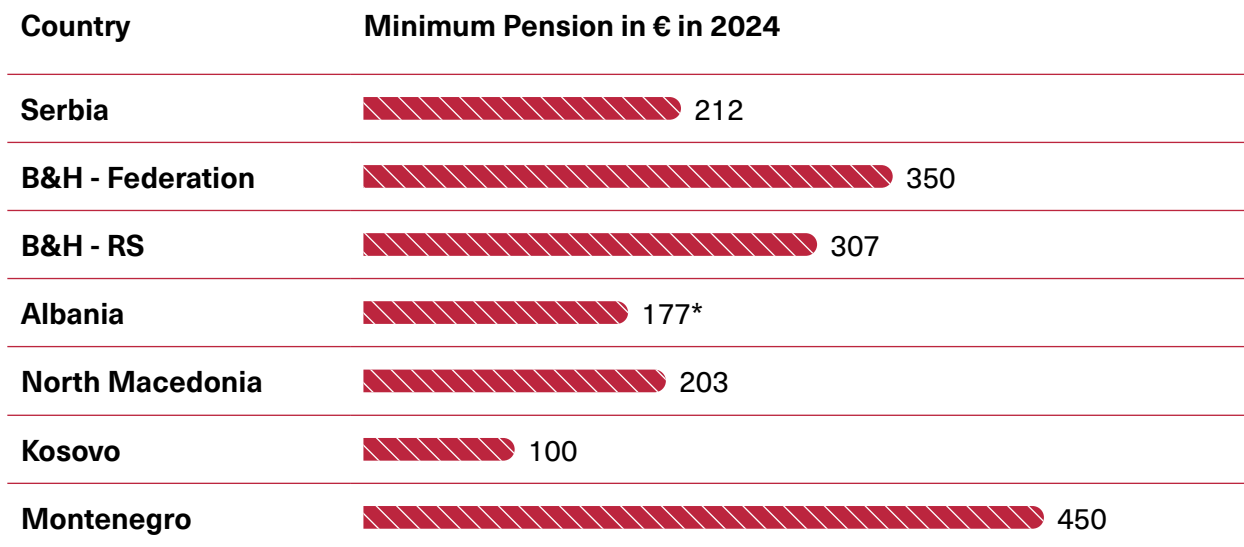
While there is no official recognition of a living wage, i.e. a wage that is sufficient to meet the basic social and existential needs of workers and their families, independent calculations by civil society and trade unions suggest that the current minimum wages in average cover only about a third of the estimated living wage in the region.

Country	Minimum Wage in € 2024 (net)	Living Wage in €	Gap between Minimum & Living Wage
Serbia	406	1,235*	Minimum Wage covers 31,52% of the Living Wage
B&H - Federation	316	920**	Minimum Wage covers 34,4% of the Living Wage
B&H - RS	460	920**	Minimum Wage covers 50% of the living Wage
Albania	360	1,004**	Minimum Wage covers 35,85% of the Living Wage
North Macedonia	365	840**	Minimum Wage covers 43.2% of the Living Wage
Kosovo	342	1,152***	Minimum Wage covers 29.68% of the Living Wage
Montenegro	450	1,850***	Minimum Wage covers 24.32% of the Living Wage

* Calculation for 2023 / ** Calculation for 2021 / *** Calculation for 2024

3. Minimum Pension (2024)

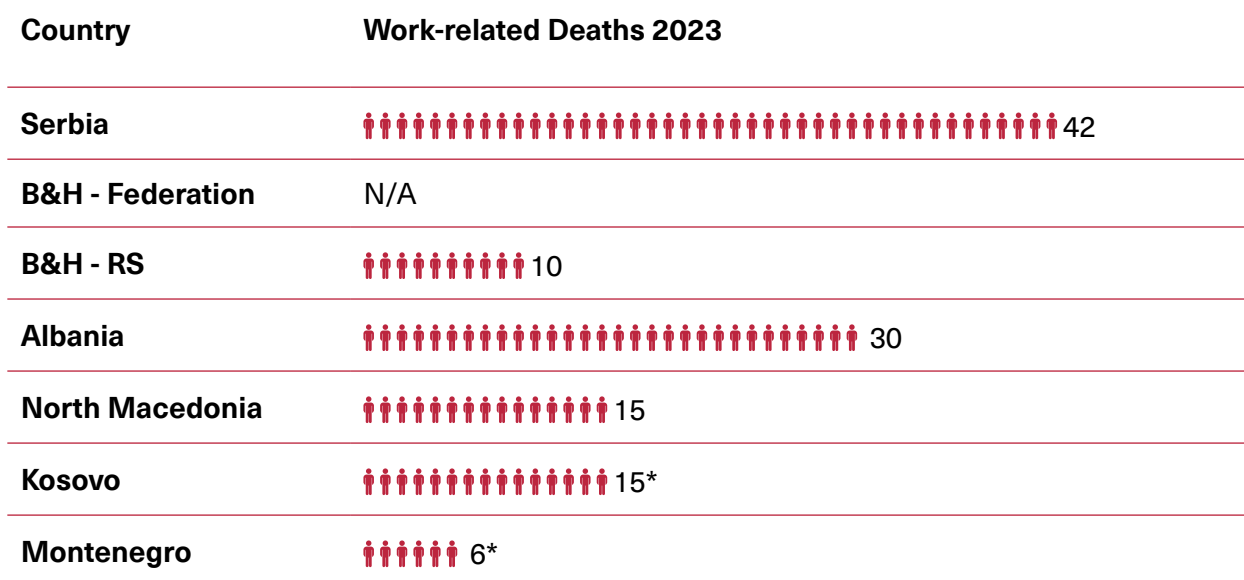
The average minimum pension in the region in 2024 was €249, covering, on average, only 22.5% of the living wage. Kosovo has the lowest minimum pension at €100, while Montenegro offers the highest at €450. These figures only represent pensions based on years of service; lower pensions, such as those for farmers and social pensions, are not included.



*Data for 2023

4. Work-related Deaths & Injuries

The number of work-related fatalities shows the level of workplace safety. The region has an average of 3 work-related fatalities per 100,000 employees annually. The average rate of work-related fatalities in the region is concerning, suggesting that safety measures and labor inspection are inadequate in many countries.



*Data for 2022.

5. Average Weekly Work Hours, Indefinite-Term Contracts, and Labor Inspections

According to available Eurostat data, workers in the Western Balkans typically work longer hours compared to the EU average. In 2023, the average weekly hours of work in the main job in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were 41.7 and 41.4 hours, respectively, while Montenegro reported 42.8 hours in 2020. This is significantly higher than the EU average of 35.9 hours. It's worth noting that many people in the region hold multiple jobs to make ends meet, meaning actual working hours are much higher than the statistics show.

The use of indefinite-term contracts varies across the Western Balkans. Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have high rates of indefinite-term contracts, exceeding 70%. On the other hand, Albania and Kosovo have a significantly lower coverage of indefinite-term contracts, between 40% and 50%. Fixed-term contracts typically last up to two or three years, with exceptions in North Macedonia, where fixed-term contracts can be extended up to five years, and in Kosovo, where extensions of up to ten years are possible.

Labour inspectorates are underfunded and understaffed, with an average of only one inspector for every 10,000 workers.

Country	Indefinite-Term Contracts (%)	Labor Inspectors (per 10,000 workers)
Serbia	80%	0.92
B&H - Federation	N/A	N/A
B&H - RS	85%	1.23
Albania	43%	1.29
North Macedonia	82%	1.6
Kosovo	40.7%	0.91
Montenegro	71.6%	1.28

Socio-economic councils, as tripartite bodies within which social dialogue should take place at the national level, exist throughout the region but are not functional, often hampered by a lack of political will to engage in meaningful dialogue and enact necessary reforms. It is important to note that foreign investors do not participate in the social dialogue that should take place within the Socio-economic councils.

6. Parental, Maternity, and Paternity Leave

The region shows considerable differences in parental leave policies, including maternity and paternity leave. Most countries offer 12 months of maternity leave, but the payment schemes and eligibility conditions vary.

Country	Maternity, Paternity & Parental Leave
Serbia	Maternity leave is mandatory for three months. Parents can decide which one will use the following nine months.
B&H - Federation	Maternity leave is mandatory for 42 days after childbirth. Parental leave lasts up to 12 months in total, but parents have to decide which one will use it.
B&H - RS	Maternity leave is mandatory for 60 days after childbirth. Parental leave lasts up to 12 months in total, but parents have to decide which one will use it.
Albania	Maternity leave lasts up to 12 months and is mandatory for 63 days after childbirth. Parental leave can be divided, but parents have to decide which one will use it.
North Macedonia	Maternity leave, which can be shared between mother and father, lasts up to nine months.
Kosovo	Maternity leave lasts up to 12 months. Fathers can use up to 3 days of paid leave after childbirth.
Montenegro	Parental leave lasts up to 12 months. Both parents have a right to use it in equal parts; it is possible to transfer parental leave from one parent to another, after 30 days of its commencement. The employed parent has a right to use parental leave even if the other parent is unemployed.

To read on all indicators of the quality of workers' rights in the Western Balkans , please click here:

<https://decentworkbalkans.com/facts/>

This summary was prepared by:



This project was carried out within the framework of the Regional Decent Work Coalition, a network of 45 NGOs and trade unions in the Western Balkans committed to advancing labor rights.