



Open data refers to public sector information or government data that can be readily and widely accessed and reused [1]. This data must be available at no more than a reasonable reproduction cost, mainly available for download over the internet, in a convenient and modifiable form. Main reason behind is interoperability - the ability of diverse systems and organizations to work together, allowing for different components to intermix [2]. Opening of public data represents a phase in the development of an idea of public administration transparency, an idea which contributes to the society as a whole. Publishing public data contributes to transparency of public institutions, work efficiency of public administration, as well as to higher involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. By making governments more transparent, open data can provide clear information on how public money is being spent and how different policies are being implemented. Publicly available data can contribute to informing individuals on relevant state matters and contribute to opinion forming. With that, it can boost citizen participation in political life and promote significance of public consultations. Furthermore, open data allows citizens to obtain necessary information without needing to directly contact public administration, resulting in higher efficiency and less workload for public institutions. This can also initiate a long-lasting cooperation among different agencies and institutions in the public sector. Since there is a growing need for open data policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the intent of this policy brief is to address this need, assess and analyze the current state in this regard, as well as provide recommendations for further steps on the path towards opening data, relying on WeBER PAR Monitoring Reports for 2019/2020 [3].

Unstable Basis for an Open Data Policy Pursuit in Bosnia and Herzegovina

WeBER Monitoring activities investigated the availability of public documents, such as budget plans and reports, among different institutions in BiH.

[1] European Commission (2021), *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*, Available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/open-data> (Accessed on Dec 16, 2021)

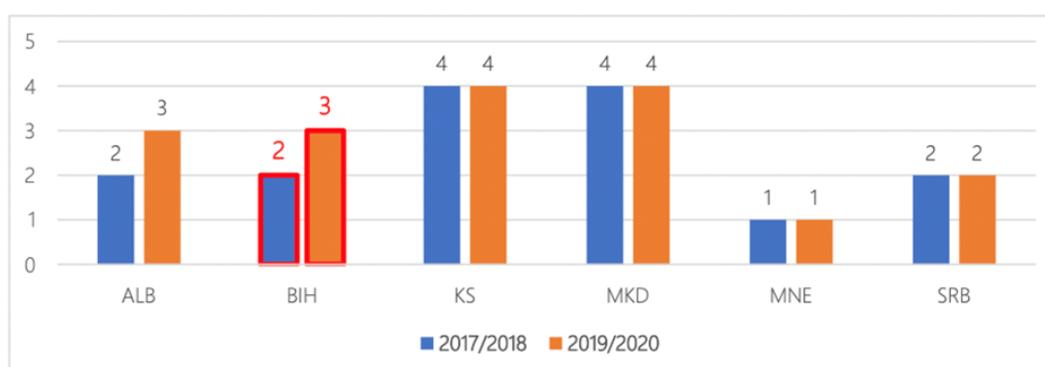
[2] Open Knowledge Foundation (2015), *The Open Data Handbook*, Available at: <http://opendatahandbook.org/guide/en/what-is-open-data/> (Accessed on Dec 16, 2021)

[3] WeBER PAR Monitoring Reports available at: <https://www.par-monitor.org>, (Accessed on Dec 16, 2021)

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On the website of the BiH Ministry of Finance and Treasury, budget documents that provide information on an annual basis are easily accessible and downloadable. Economic, organizational, and functional classifications are also included (for 2019), and so is the Citizen Budget for 2020. Further, the Audit Office of the Institutions of BiH does not yet have a defined communication strategy, but the primary communication channel with the public is the website of the Office and direct contact with the media. All financial audit reports do not have summaries and are provided all in the same format, with the first section detailing the legal basis for reporting and the methods used. Although slightly technocratic, they are written in a simple and user-friendly language. Such language is also used for summaries of performance audit reports, for example the annual Summary of Audit Reports for 2019, including visuals and outlined main findings. Further, a functional contact form is available at the SAI website where it is stated that “feedback, enquiries and suggestions” are welcome. Review of this website resulted with finding that AOI Activity Reports for 2018 and 2019 both contain information on consultations with CSO in a chapter “Communication with Public”. For some institutions, reports have not been updated regularly and some are even missing. The Central Procurement Authority’s website has reports on the implementation of the overall public procurement program available since 2006, but not for all the previous three years. Also, no reports on the work of the central review body are available. Access to complete tender paperwork is free at the public procurement portal alongside instructions on how to use its features, but tender documentation is only open to certified registered users, which immediately excludes CSOs and the public. Public procurement plans for the current and previous year have been published by 6 out of 9 state level ministries, whereas only 1 published procurement reports for the last two years.

Figure 1: Transparency and accessibility of budgetary documents (regional comparison)

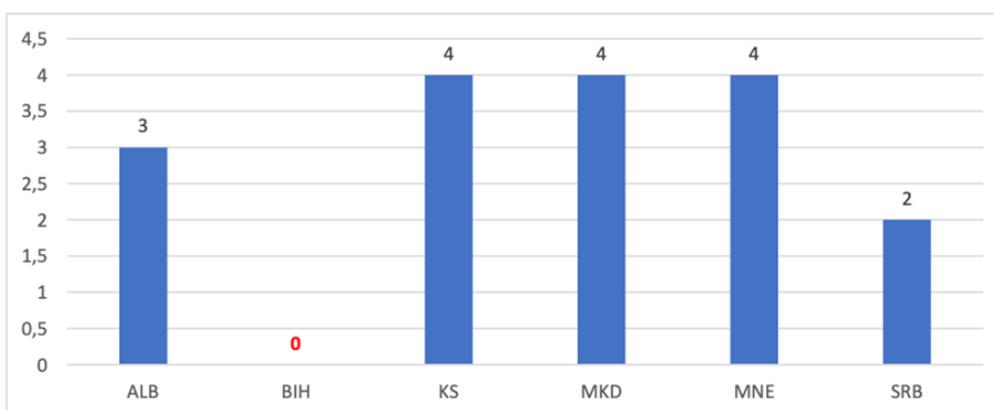


Source: WeBER Regional PAR Monitor Report for the Western Balkans 2019/2020

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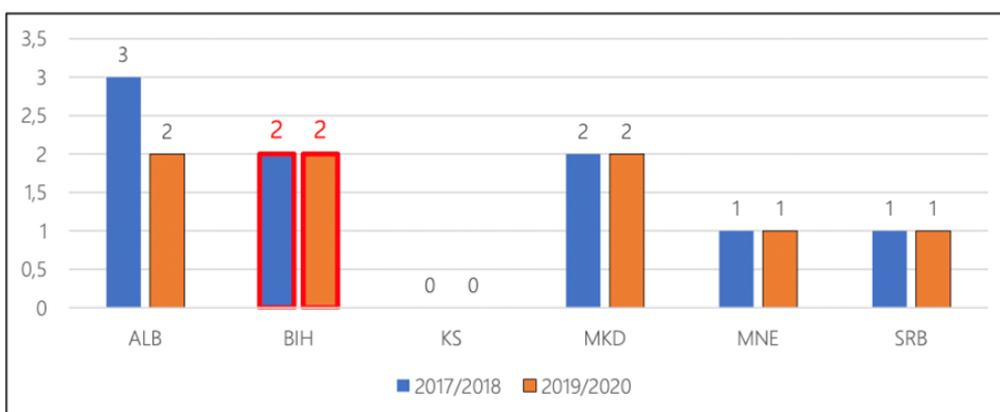
Law on Financing of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina specifies the obligation to publish quarterly, semi-annual and annual reports on PIFC, but lacks a definite deadline. Moreover, according to the Law on Internal Audit of BiH, there is no definite deadline for preparing the consolidated annual report for internal audit. Overall, it can be noted that there is a lack of proactive approach from ministries when it comes to publishing financial management and control information and this kind of information isn't available online. Proactive public involvement is notable among the CHU published summaries (although the text is rather technical and bureaucratic), but there have been no public appearances on PIFC issues, no leaflet distribution, and no social media activity available. Yet, the Audit Office does have a Twitter account, where promo materials and infographics are available. Lastly, the analysis of the Parliament website indicated that the Parliament regularly publishes the consolidated reports on PIFC.

Figure 2: Availability of public procurement related information to the public



Source: WeBER Regional PAR Monitor Report for the Western Balkans 2019/2020

Figure 3: Public availability of information on public internal financial controls and the parliamentary scrutiny



Source: WeBER Regional PAR Monitor Report for the Western Balkans 2019/2020

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When evaluating the level of readiness for open data policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, WeBER PAR Monitor Report indicates that there is a need for advancement and capacity building. The main obstacle is found in the fact that there is no overarching governing body that would place open data as a priority. Moreover, recognized is the lack of professional capacities, in terms of IT experts, a lack of unified database and basic practices of data regulation among all institutional levels [4]. To ensure transparency, public authorities should start publishing at least one dataset pertaining to their scope of work in line with the open data standards. However, there were no improvements in this area since the last monitor cycle, indicating that BiH institutions are still not pursuing open data policy.

Moving Forward...

The authorities need to improve data collection and make it open and easily accessible for the citizens and external stakeholders, preferably using citizen-friendly language, comprehensive datasets, and separate, clear sections on the official websites. To improve the prospects in creating open data policies and implementing them in practice, the existing laws on freedom of access to information must be revised. This can be done by ensuring adequate legal protection in the field of access and re-use of public data, i.e. determining the competent institution for resolving disputes in cases when public institutions restrict the re-use of public data. Further, strengthening the capacity of public institutions and organizing trainings among civil servants in the field of data management and their publication in appropriate formats.

To ensure efficiency and transparency, open data portals at the state and entities level in BiH should be established, while open public data should be published on these portals. Moreover, the civil society sector should be more active in promoting and negotiating open data policy, as well as using technology to engage citizens. A different government approach is needed to inform citizens in a more efficient way, either through eConsultations or social media engagement. Lastly, the existing resources and capacities in the BiH IT sector should be used to upgrade the outdated system and working methods, to make them compatible with the open data policies.

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For more information, please visit:

www.par-monitor.org

[4] PARCO (2020), Procjena spremnosti za otvorene podatke u Bosni i Hercegovini, Available at: https://parco.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Procjena-spremnosti-za-otvorene-podatke_HR.pdf (Accessed on Dec 16, 2021)