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International mobility as a development strategy: Kosovo Country Report

June 2024



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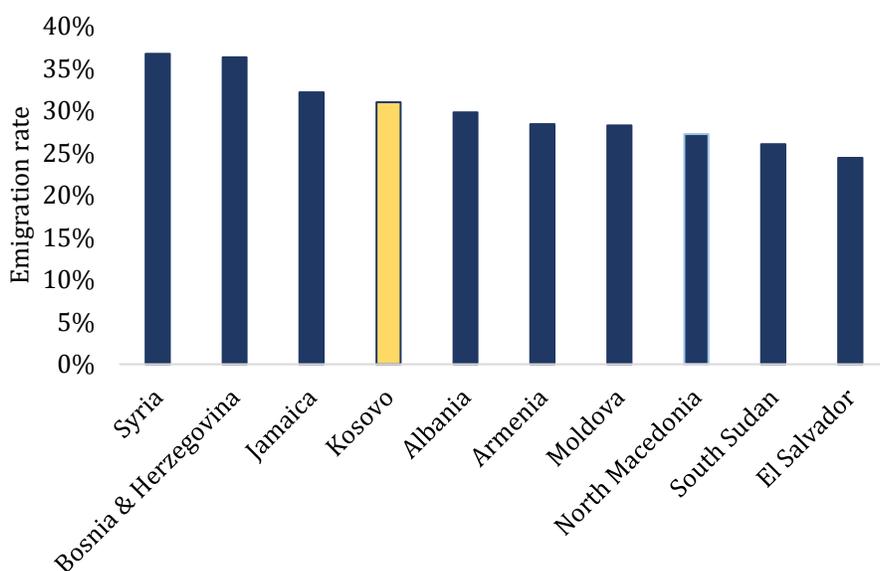
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Executive Summary

Kosovo is a country with a history of emigration...

Emigration has played an important role throughout Kosovo's history. Calculations based on government figures suggest that the total number of Kosovar emigrants is nearly 800,000.¹ This implies that almost one in every three people born in Kosovo lives abroad, placing Kosovo among the top five origin countries with the highest emigration rates in the world.² Historically, emigration has been driven by both political and economic reasons, but in recent years international mobility has primarily been the result of economic motives. The majority of Kosovar migrants live in the European Union and are primarily low-skilled working age men, although recent estimates for the period 2022-2023 suggest this trend may be changing, with more migrants reporting having tertiary education (20 percent).³

Figure ES1. Emigration rates (2020)



Source: World Bank Global Migration Database (all countries minus Kosovo).

Note: Emigration rates are calculated by dividing the number of emigrants from a country by the total number of people born in that country (emigrants plus non-migrants). The figure only includes countries with populations larger than one million. The emigration rate for Kosovo is calculated using estimates of migrants and population from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

¹ This estimate only includes people born in Kosovo living abroad. The calculation is based on the census conducted in 2011 that found an estimated total population of 550,000 who had emigrated from Kosovo, plus net migration between 2012 and 2020, which accounts for around 245,000 individuals, according to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics. The 703,978 figure from the census in 2011 includes children of Kosovar nationals born outside Kosovo.

Republic of Kosovo (2021); Government Authority on Migration (2018a, 2023).

² World Bank Global Migration Database.

³ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

Emigration for economic opportunities is driven by labor market differentials with nearby European countries. Despite recent economic progress in Kosovo, there are significant wage gaps that create opportunities for migrants to earn higher incomes abroad. Average gross wages are more than twice as high in nearby Croatia and as much as seven times higher in Germany or Austria.⁴ While unemployment has been rapidly decreasing in recent years, it still remains high at 10.7 percent⁵ in 2023, compared to the EU average of around 7 percent. In addition, the labor force participation rate is less than 40 percent,⁶ one of the lowest in Europe. There is also a dearth of high-quality private sector jobs, as many lack contracts or are short in duration, which also contributes to limit the number of attractive economic opportunities for citizens in Kosovo.⁷

Kosovar emigration has also responded to changing migration policies in destination countries. As populations in the EU continue to age, many countries are considering migration as a strategy to address growing labor shortages. For example, Germany has actively passed new legislation creating opportunities for labor migration from Kosovo, including the Western Balkan Regulation in 2016 that facilitated a legal labor migration pathway for low-skill workers from Kosovo (and other Western Balkan countries) and the Skilled Workers Immigration Act that simplified admission procedures for skilled workers in strategic sectors from outside the European Union. During the period of these legislative changes, the number of Kosovar workers in Germany increased from 67,020 in 2016 to 135,870 in 2023.^{8,9}

Some Kosovar migrants return to Kosovo at a later stage, including many who applied for asylum and whose application was rejected. A comprehensive account of the total number of returned migrants is difficult due to data constraints, though estimates suggest that in recent years the average is around 5-6,000 per year.¹⁰ This is significantly lower than the levels in the mid-2010s, which reached nearly 20,000 in 2015, due to the high numbers of those returned under readmission agreements. The migrants who return are typically young and male, reflecting emigration patterns. Surveys addressing rejected asylum seekers who had to return to Kosovo in 2014-15 show that this group had lower levels of education than the population in Kosovo overall, with an average of around 9 years of schooling (lower secondary).¹¹ More recent data on returned economic migrants show higher education levels (nearly 40 percent of returned migrants had a university education), particularly among those that migrated for shorter periods of time.¹²

The existence of a sizeable and engaged diaspora impacts Kosovar society in different ways...

Migration is an important poverty alleviation strategy for many Kosovar families. Preliminary data from the Life in Transition Survey for the period 2022-2023 suggest that around 80 percent of migrants have sent remittances at least once.¹³ Further, evidence shows that poverty levels in Kosovo

⁴ SEE Jobs Gateway.

⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2023 Q2).

⁶ Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

⁷ European Training Foundation (2021).

⁸ <https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/DE/Navigation/Statistiken/Interaktive-Statistiken/Migration-Zuwanderung-Flucht/Migration-Zuwanderung-Flucht-Nav.html>

⁹ Additional analysis of data from Germany shows that the total number of Kosovo-born migrants living in Germany has increased by 75 percent from 2010 to 2022. The number of employed Kosovars (including second-generation) living in Germany has increased from 102,000 to 251,000 (160,000 men and 91,000 women) over the same period while the number of unemployed Kosovars has declined from 19,000 to 13,000. GAP Institute (2023).

¹⁰ Government Authority on Migration (2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2021; 2023).

¹¹ Möllers et al. (2017).

¹² Kantar and GIZ (2022).

¹³ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

would be 3 percent higher if migration did not exist.¹⁴ Recent evidence also suggests that remittances continue to play an important role for families in Kosovo. In 2023 they amounted to \$1.9 billion,¹⁵ or 18 percent of GDP, one of the highest rates in the world.¹⁶ Recent figures suggest that almost two in every three families in Kosovo report receiving remittances.¹⁷

The Kosovar diaspora has additional developmental impacts on the country via a multiplicity of channels. This includes knowledge and technological transfers, the creation of global networks, and direct investments in the local economy. Surveys of business owners in Kosovo confirm these findings: 90 percent of those who migrated in the past report gaining valuable experience or skills, 20 percent say that their workers gained experience, skills, or knowledge from abroad,¹⁸ and many report having brought new ideas back after living abroad.¹⁹ The diaspora can also be a source of financing for entrepreneurship. Initial evidence suggests that Kosovar businesses benefit from financial support from the diaspora.²⁰

High levels of emigration have raised concerns about the loss of human capital, at least in certain sectors and in the short term. Kosovo has recorded large net population outflows for nine of the last ten years, particularly among the working age population. This has led to concerns that the outmigration of people can translate into a ‘brain drain’. According to the Balkan Business Barometer of 2021, 37 percent of businesses believe that emigration of the workforce was a reason for unfilled job vacancies.²¹ High levels of emigration can generate labor shortages in certain sectors and skills. In the medical sector for example, 826 medical professionals in Kosovo have withdrawn their certifications in anticipation of emigration since 2018, with 152 doing so in 2023 alone.²² At the same time, Kosovo only has 170 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants, which is lower than other countries in the region and significantly lower than the EU average of 372. Nevertheless, the situation is more complex, as these figures coexist with a sizeable domestic unemployment rate of doctors²³ due to resource constraints that limit the full utilization of medical professionals in the country.²⁴

However, evidence suggests that when well-designed policies are in place, migration can lead to a ‘brain gain’. Emigration can become a source for growth of human capital in two ways. First, remittances can increase the resources allocated to education for family members who remain in Kosovo. Second, individuals may have stronger incentives to invest in education in anticipation of migration opportunities, which, however, will not necessarily materialize for all of them. Evidence from the Philippines shows that, in response to increased opportunities for nurses to migrate, the country expanded nursing education programs and more people chose to enroll in this field of education. For each nurse that emigrated, nine new nurses were licensed in the country, significantly increasing the human capital in the Philippines.²⁵ There is also evidence that this is occurring in the health sector in Kosovo through the Heimerer College, a private sector initiative that provides healthcare training and migration opportunities through an ‘abroad track.’ While some participants

¹⁴ Möllers and Meyer (2014).

¹⁵ This estimate is based on balance of payments data reported to the IMF and includes the standard components of personal transfers and employee compensation.

¹⁶ World Bank-KNOMAD, December 2023.

¹⁷ Regional Cooperation Council (2022a).

¹⁸ Haxhikadrija (2009).

¹⁹ Möllers et al. (2017).

²⁰ Haxhikadrija (2009).

²¹ OECD (2022).

²² Hashani et al. (2024).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ European Training Foundation (2021).

²⁵ Abarcar and Theoharides (2024).

do migrate, the data show that 80 percent of those who are employed after graduation remain in Kosovo.

Kosovo's system for managing emigration has evolved to meet the country's needs and opportunities...

Kosovo has invested in a strong legal framework that has evolved to better manage the process of emigration. The framework is built around the National Strategy on Migration 2021-2025, which was developed in parallel with the National Development Strategy and is aligned with international standards. These strategic documents recognize the importance of emigration for Kosovo, and are aligned with ongoing initiatives to increase mobility such as the Common Regional Market Action Plan and the recent enactment of visa liberalization with the European Union.

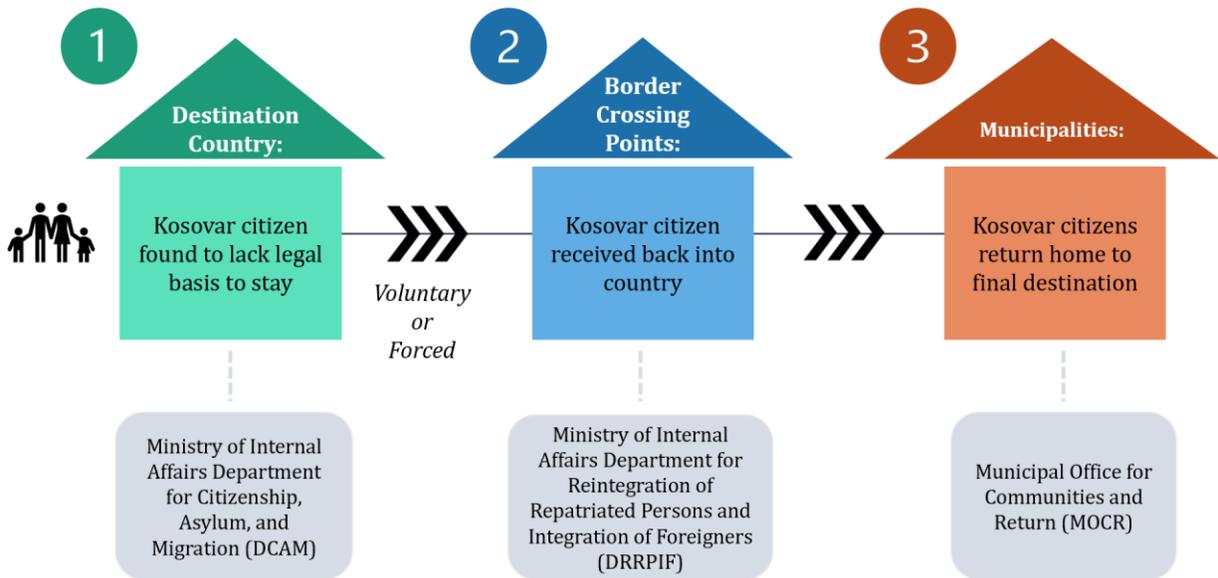
Kosovo's legal framework also includes a strong system, built in collaboration with European partners, for the repatriation and readmission of Kosovars who migrated irregularly. The system grew in importance as the number of Kosovar migrants in need of repatriation surged in the mid-2010s. At the heart of the system are bilateral readmission agreements signed with 24 countries to regulate the requirements and procedures for managing the cooperative return of migrants subject to removal in those destination countries.²⁶ Responsibility is divided institutionally between two principal departments in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration. The process of repatriation, which refers to the collaborative procedures for returning migrants to Kosovo is managed by the Department for Citizenship, Asylum, and Migration. The process of reintegration, which includes case management support with immediate, emergency, and sustainable development services is managed by the Department for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners. The entire reintegration process is supported by an electronic Case Management System, which is accessible by all relevant stakeholders and can track services received and outcomes for migrants from their return to Kosovo to the closure of their case.²⁷ Municipalities are also assigned a key role in the process and are the main provider of services for repatriated migrants in their communities.²⁸

²⁶ European Training Foundation (2021).

²⁷ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

²⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2010a).

Figure ES2. Kosovo has a strong system for the repatriation and reintegration of migrants



Kosovo’s management of emigration also includes different efforts focused on leveraging the diaspora for development purposes. These include efforts that aim to create impact from the skills and knowledge of migrants while they are abroad. An example is the Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship Program, which offers young diaspora professionals short-term roles working directly in government ministries in Kosovo and supporting the policy-making process. Other efforts focus on leveraging the financial resources of the diaspora and are mainly led by development partners. For example, the MARDI project implemented by Caritas Switzerland tries to attract diaspora investment by creating networking opportunities between diaspora investors and Kosovar businesses, and then offering matching funds for investments.²⁹ Recognizing the development potential of an engaged diaspora, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora is working on strengthening diaspora data.

The current migration system can be strengthened through a holistic policy approach...

Policy actions in the area of migration in Kosovo can build off existing strengths and embrace the idea of a global workforce that can have significant development impact. Emigration plays an important role in Kosovo and the Kosovar diaspora is strong and remains financially connected. Kosovo has also strengthened collaboration with European destination countries to build a robust system for the repatriation and reintegration of migrants. But to unleash the full development impact of migration, Kosovo could consider a vision of Kosovar migration that emphasizes the idea of a global workforce, which includes not just those who currently reside within its borders, but also the skills, talent, and knowledge of Kosovar migrants around the world. Members of the Kosovar global workforce can contribute to a development agenda in different ways regardless of their current or future migration plans.

To achieve this vision, reforms can build on existing efforts in three areas: migration governance, the services provided to migrants, and the underlying data landscape. The governance system for managing migration can be strengthened by fully integrating migration into key development strategies. The existing migration infrastructure has been formulated as a response

²⁹ Caritas Switzerland (2023a; 2023b).

to the needs of the most vulnerable migrants and reforms can target ways to proactively leverage the potential benefits of successful migration. Policy actions to strengthen migration governance can also build on existing bilateral collaborations. Kosovo has used readmission agreements to build a robust system for the repatriation and reintegration of migrants and similar agreements can also be used to enhance the benefits of migration for migrants and for Kosovo. Global Skills Partnerships offer one example of a type of bilateral agreement that manages migration in a way that mitigates potential losses of human capital. To unlock the potential of the global workforce, Kosovo can also explore policy actions to expand the provision of services to migrants at each stage of their migration cycle that leverage the potential for development impact. Though migration has the potential for large economic gains, there are also particular vulnerabilities that migrants face that require support and services. Although Kosovo has a strong system for providing services to address the adverse conditions of migrants who are repatriated, there are currently limited services offered to ensure that migrants are well-prepared for migration and to leverage successful emigration for development gains. A more effective management of Kosovo's global workforce also depends on strong data collection that can track migrants' needs, and that can be used to design evidence-based policies. Periodic household surveys that incorporate questions on migration and dedicated ad-hoc surveys that focus on migration history are examples of useful tools that can enhance the data infrastructure underlying policies to manage an engaged global workforce.

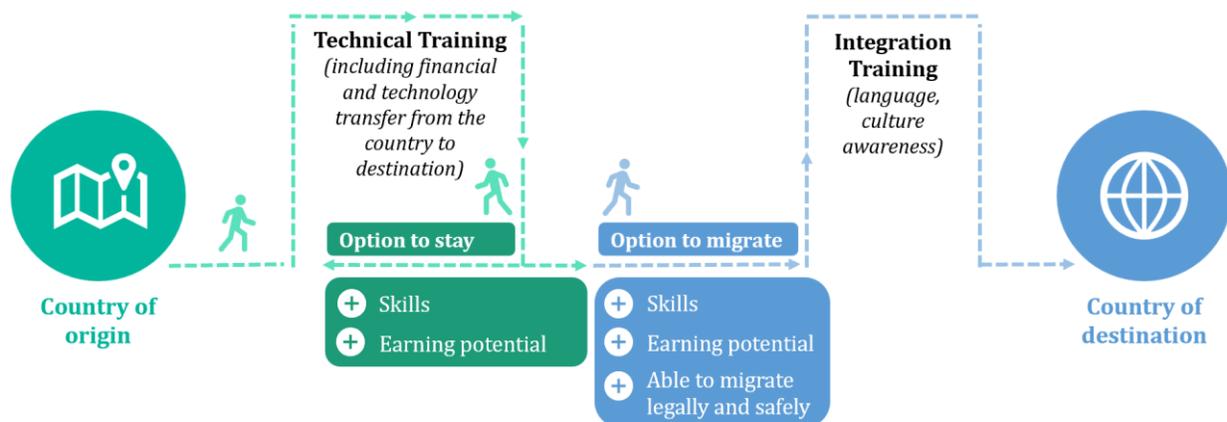
Global Skills Partnerships are a feasible policy mechanism to strategically manage migration in line with development goals...

Migration is well integrated into countries' development strategies when it is aligned to labor market needs. Aligning migration to labor market needs requires an understanding of what skills the labor force currently has and what the economy needs – including where there are mismatches between the skills being produced and those in demand. The current state of the labor market in Kosovo presents both challenges and opportunities that connect to migration. The challenges include a low level of activity among the working-age population, a mismatch in skills between what employers need and what the labor force offers, and constraints on the creation of new high-quality jobs. In this context, migration can offer policy opportunities to invest in skill development that meets both the domestic and global labor market needs.

While there are multiple potential entry points for a policy agenda around migration, Global Skills Partnerships are one policy tool that can ensure migration is holistically integrated into development strategies. Via this program, selected candidates receive training in the origin country – some remaining for employment at home through a 'domestic track' and others migrating to the destination country through an 'abroad track.' This model aims to address skills shortages in both countries while strengthening a formal migration channel. Under this model, the destination country agrees to provide resources for the training of workers in the country of origin. Meanwhile, the two tracks ensure that both countries experience net gains of skilled workers and human capital (see figure ES4). This model also ensures investment into the education and training system in the country of origin, building its capacity and aligning it with international standards.³⁰ Given Kosovo's strong existing linkages with destination countries and the potential of this instrument to address labor market needs in line with key national objectives, this report looks specifically at Global Skills Partnerships as one policy solution to maximize the benefits of Kosovar migration.

³⁰ Adhikari et al. (2021).

Figure ES3. The third model follows the Global Skills Partnership concept

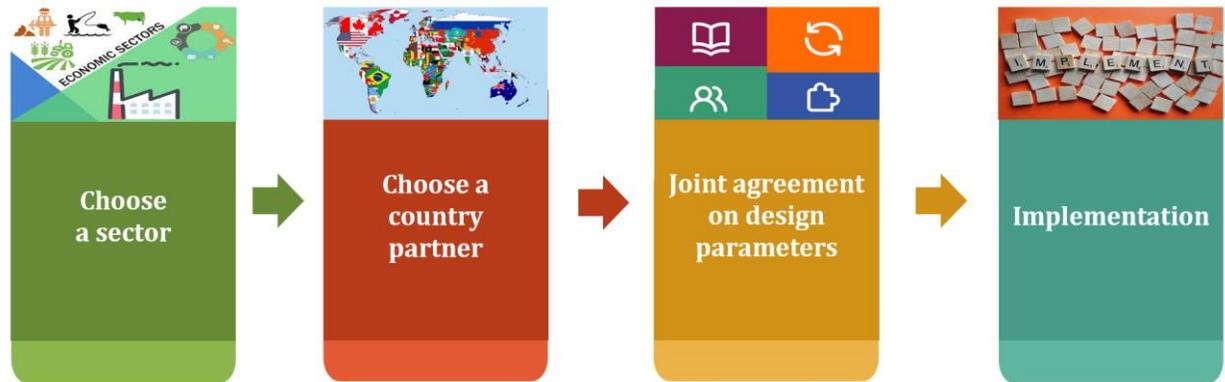


Source: Expanding Legal Migration Pathways from Nigeria to Europe, World Bank.

A Global Skills Partnership model would fit Kosovo’s needs given underlying labor market realities and priorities established in the Employment Strategy 2023-2027. Global Skills Partnerships could offer the opportunity to address Kosovo’s labor market challenges of inactivity, skills mismatch, and the low quality of jobs being created. They can do this by generating investment in human capital and then training workers in the advanced skillsets employers are seeking. Facilitating these high-quality job opportunities can increase labor market participation while simultaneously combating the risk of ‘brain drain’ from the net emigration of skilled workers. A Global Skills Partnership would also support Kosovo in improving the quality of the skills training system to meet international standards. Outlined in the Employment Strategy 2023-2027 are objectives designed to reduce vertical skills mismatch and increase adult participation in training programs, which align with the benefits an origin country can enjoy in a Global Skills Partnership.

The details of a Global Skills Partnership are defined by a series of strategic decisions. One strategic decision is the choice of a sectoral focus, which can be determined by where there are mutual skills shortages and employer demand for skilled workers in both countries. Another key decision is the choice of a country partner, which can be based on shared needs and existing economic and cultural linkages. Once a country partner and sectoral focus have been determined, the countries jointly agree on key details such as how the migration will be managed, including the length of work permits, the details of the training curriculum, including the integration of language, cultural awareness, and practical training, and the process for recognizing skills. Finally, the countries together determine how the agreement will be financed. Global Skills Partnerships are built on the idea that contributions should come from all who benefit.

Figure ES4. Key steps determine the design of a Global Skills Partnership



There is increasing interest from European Union countries in international mobility models similar to Global Skills Partnerships. The Talent Partnerships announced in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum are examples of these programs. Talent Partnerships are a policy and funding framework that can be used to enhance legal pathways to the EU, focusing on mutually beneficial international mobility through better matching of labor market needs and skills between the EU and partner countries. The concept includes the provision of capacity building assistance in partner countries, including for vocational education and training, as well as direct support for nationals of those countries to study, work, or train in the EU.³¹ EU countries are increasingly interested in models, such as Global Skills Partnerships, that fit within the Talent Partnership framework.

For Kosovo, a potential EU partner for a Global Skills Partnership could be Austria, given existing linkages between the two countries. There is a history of migration from Kosovo to Austria, with nearly 35,000 Kosovars still living there.³² Given this migration history, many Kosovar diaspora organizations exist in Austria, aiming to build bridges between the two countries and promote economic cooperation. An engaged diaspora in a destination country can support a Global Skills Partnership through their knowledge, investment potential, and by facilitating the integration of away-track trainees in the destination country. In recent years, there have been limited opportunities for employment-based migration from Kosovo to Austria, which contrasts with other countries with strong historical linkages to Kosovo such as Germany. In this context, Austria would be a strong candidate for developing a formal migration channel through a Global Skills Partnership.

³¹ European Commission (n.d.).

³² Eurostat 'Population on 1 January by age group, sex, and country of birth' (2023).

Figure ES5. Multiple factors make a partnership between Kosovo and Austria feasible



Additionally, Kosovo is one of the priority countries identified by Austria for investment in training and international mobility. Six countries were identified by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce as part of the International Skilled Workers Offensive to improve the targeting of migrants from strategic countries in designated sectors of need. The countries were identified as targets for migration and training agreements based on compatibility of training systems, age structure, diplomatic relationships, and cultural affinity. Austria is also already investing in the training system in Kosovo through the Aligning Education and Training with Labor Market Needs (ALLED) Phase II program, co-funded by the European Union and Austrian Development Cooperation and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency. The program aims to reduce poverty through increased labor market participation and improved employability by aligning education and training systems with labor market needs and building specific cooperation between training institutions and the private sector. The program has a specific focus on enhancing the quality of vocational education and training (VET). Through this program, Austria provides direct support to the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) and the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK) to invest in building a stronger and more relevant training system.³³

A Global Skills Partnership between Kosovo and Austria could have labor market benefits for both countries. According to the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, 82 percent of companies in Austria are already suffering from a shortage of skilled workers and by the year 2040, the number of working-age adults will be further reduced by 262,000 people. Job vacancies are on the rise and unemployment remains low.³⁴ In addition to the International Skilled Workers Offensive, Austria has demonstrated a commitment to rectifying these labor market shortages by taking several legislative steps that have improved the process for recruiting skilled workers. A Global Skills Partnership with Austria could also directly address Kosovo's labor market challenges of inactivity, skills mismatch, and low levels of quality job creation. In particular, a partnership with Austria would provide an

³³ Austrian Development Cooperation (n.d. -a).

³⁴ Austrian Chamber of Commerce (2024).

opportunity to improve training quality to EU standards in a selected sector of strategic importance with unfulfilled employer demand.

There are several practical ways to determine a relevant sector of focus for a partnership between Kosovo and Austria. Every year, the Ministry of Labor and Economy in Austria publishes a list of shortage occupations in need of qualified workers. The list included 110 occupations with Austria-wide shortages in 2024, as well as a list of specific regional shortages. The International Skilled Workers Offensive also selects specific shortage occupations as focus sectors for their efforts, which include a wide range of occupations such as nursing staff, IT professionals, mechanical engineers, carpenters, and others. Austria would benefit from an agreement to add to the supply of skilled workers in any of these sectors. Meanwhile, Kosovo's Employment Strategy outlines policy priorities for improving overall employment including through the development of human capital, in alignment with priorities from the National Development Strategy and Industrial Strategy such as green production and digital transformation.

A partnership between Austria and Kosovo would benefit from prior experiences in both countries and the experience and support of the international community. Austria is currently involved in the process of starting a training and migration partnership with Egypt, which similarly focuses on skills development of the Egyptian workforce and ensuring the mobility of some participants. Austria also has significant experience exporting their TVET model and building capacity for training systems in partner countries around the world through the Austrian Development Agency and the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. Similarly, Kosovo can build on its own experience, including the case of the Heimerer College, which has shown how training and migration can be structured together in a way that ensures human capital is developed for labor markets both at home and abroad - and can lead to high-quality jobs for those who stay. In addition to their own lessons learned, both countries could also count on the experience of the international community and lessons learned from Global Skills Partnerships around the world.

The timing is appropriate for a Global Skills Partnership between Kosovo and Austria. The Kosovar government recognizes the importance of investing to strategically build the skills of its workforce. A Global Skills Partnership is a mechanism that could specifically target key groups and generate positive impacts in the labor market. Austria represents a viable candidate for a partnership with Kosovo, given the linkages between the countries, the existing presence of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce and ADA in Kosovo, and their ongoing financing of training programs. A Global Skills Partnership offers a unique opportunity for Kosovo to strategically incorporate migration as part of a broader development strategy and to manage it in partnership with destination countries, in a way that leads to strengthening of the domestic training system and to human capital development at home.

Chapter I. Background and Context

Section 1.1. The migration of Kosovars: trends, drivers, profile, and outcomes

Emigration has historically been a prominent phenomenon in Kosovo, with around 700,000-900,000 members of the Kosovar diaspora currently living abroad. The exact number of total Kosovars abroad is difficult to estimate precisely due to data limitations. The most recent census, conducted in 2011, identified that 550,000 people who were born in Kosovo were living abroad during that year. In addition, it was estimated that an additional 150,000 people were second-generation Kosovars in the diaspora, i.e. individuals born abroad³⁵ from a Kosovar parent.³⁶ In the decade since the last census, the number of emigrants from Kosovo has continued to grow. Calculations based on government figures suggest a total number of nearly 800,000 Kosovar emigrants³⁷ living abroad, a figure that increases to nearly 950,000 people when including second-generation migrants.³⁸ Despite difficulties in estimating precise numbers, taken together these figures highlight the large scale of emigration from Kosovo.

Relative to its population size, Kosovo is one of the countries with the largest diaspora in the world. The calculated emigration rate for Kosovo is around 31 percent,³⁹ which places it among the 5 highest countries in the world with a population of more one million inhabitants.⁴⁰ Among the other countries with the highest emigration rates in the world are regional neighbors in the Western Balkans and some small island countries.

³⁵ The commonly cited figure of 703,978 Kosovars abroad includes this estimate of children based on the medium variant population estimate, which is useful to understand the diaspora, but does not explicitly count international migrants.

³⁶ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2014).

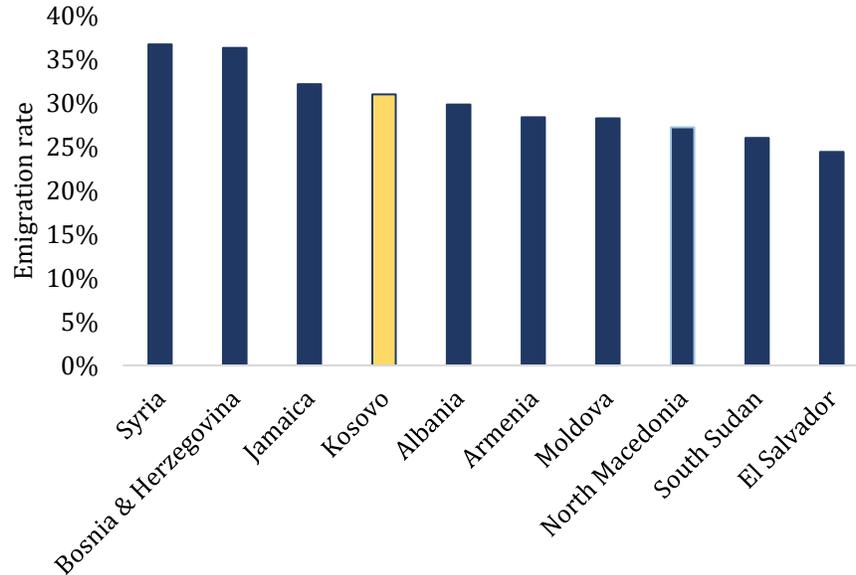
³⁷ The calculation is based on the census estimate plus net migration between 2012 and 2020, which accounts for around 245,000 individuals, according to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

³⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2021); Government Authority on Migration (2018a, 2023).

³⁹ Emigration rates are often calculated taking into account just those 15 years and older, in both emigrant and native populations. Data limitations prevented this calculation from being done for only the 15+ population in Kosovo.

⁴⁰ Including countries with a population of at least one million people. Data from the World Bank Global Migration Database.

Figure 1. Emigration rates (2020)



Source: World Bank Global Migration Database (all countries minus Kosovo)

Note: Emigration rates are calculated by dividing the number of emigrants from a country by the total number of people born in that country (emigrants plus non-migrants). The figure only includes countries with populations larger than one million. The emigration rate for Kosovo is calculated using estimates of migrants and population from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

Trends in migration flows show the Kosovar diaspora has been growing in recent years. While statistics of the stock of migrants give a one-off snapshot of the total number of emigrants that reside abroad at a given point in time, migration flow data show who leaves and returns to the country each year. Net migration outflows (number of those that emigrate minus immigrants and those that return) for the year 2012-2016 reached 123,000.⁴¹ Furthermore, population statistics from the last five years suggest an additional estimated net emigration of over 100,000 people.⁴²

Recent evidence suggests that intentions to migrate among Kosovars remain high, though many may prefer to stay abroad for a limited amount of time. A survey from 2018 found that slightly more than 34 percent of young people expressed a strong or very strong desire to move to another country, with a 'ready-to-move' population of 129,000 people.⁴³ However, the majority of those intending to migrate were seeking short-to-medium term times abroad, ranging from 6 months (37 percent) to two years (34 percent). Looking at the overall population, the most recent data collected as part of a new wave of the World Bank's Life in Transition Survey (LITS IV) in 2022-23, found that over 15 percent of individuals intend to or are considering moving abroad in just the next 12 months, which is twice as much as those who intend to move within the country.⁴⁴

In Kosovo, emigration has been historically driven by both political and economic reasons for many decades. From 1945-1964, during the first years of the Socialist Federal Republic of

⁴¹ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

⁴² Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

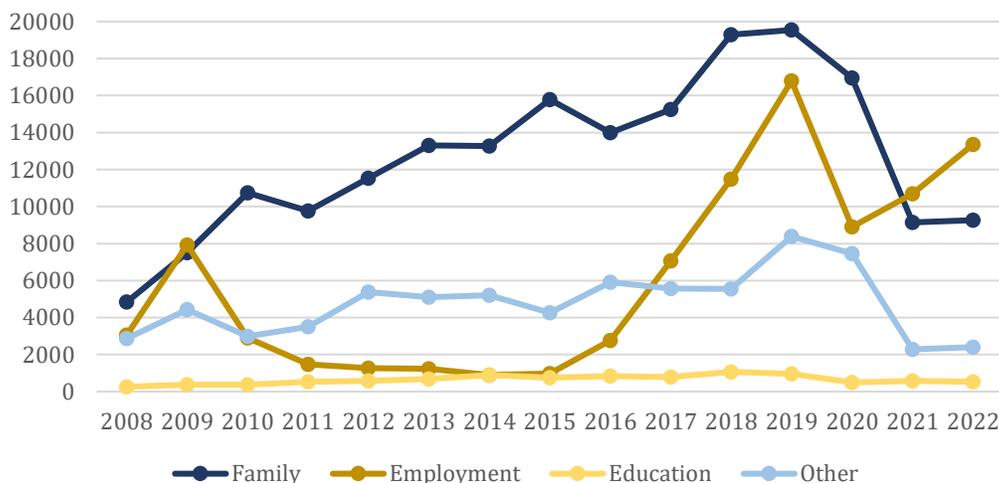
⁴³ European Training Foundation (2021).

⁴⁴ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV (2022-23).

Yugoslavia, the country was closed off from the rest of the world, limiting migration. However, people still found ways to leave, primarily to Türkiye, which was also the destination of nearly 400,000 forced migrants.^{45,46} This was followed by primarily economic migration in the late 1960's, mainly from rural and low-income parts of Kosovo.⁴⁷ Emigration in the 1970's continued to be mostly about seeking better jobs and living conditions, and was focused within the former Yugoslavia. The shift in emigration patterns to different European destinations occurred starting in the 1980's and 1990's.⁴⁸ Politically driven emigration increased rapidly in the late 1990's, peaking in 1998-1999 following the war that forcibly displaced 850,000 people, though the majority chose to return after the peace accords were signed in 1999.⁴⁹

Since 2000, emigration has mainly been driven by economic factors, along with family reunification. Despite the return of the majority of those who were forcibly displaced by the war, a significant number of migrants stayed abroad, creating opportunities for family reunification that would persist in the most recent decades. This phenomenon can be noted in the data (see Figure 9) with family reunification being the primary reason for first-time permits in the EU until recent years. Employment was also a significant reason for first-time EU permits, although it showed more cyclical patterns aligned with the economic activity in the EU, declining in the early 2010's due to the sovereign debt crisis, and rising again in recent years, with the exception of the temporary halt in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As restrictions eased in 2021, more Kosovars sought to emigrate again, leading to a total estimated emigration of nearly 43,000 people, including both regular and irregular migration channels.⁵⁰ Although much of this emigration is temporary in nature, there is also a significant amount of emigration that becomes permanent (or relatively permanent), which can be seen in the steady number of Kosovars who acquire citizenship from the EU each year (around 9,000-13,000 according to Eurostat statistics).

Figure 2. First-time permits for Kosovars in the EU



Source: Eurostat.

⁴⁵ Haxhikadrija (2009).

⁴⁶ Hajdari and Krasniqi (2021).

⁴⁷ Haxhikadrija (2009).

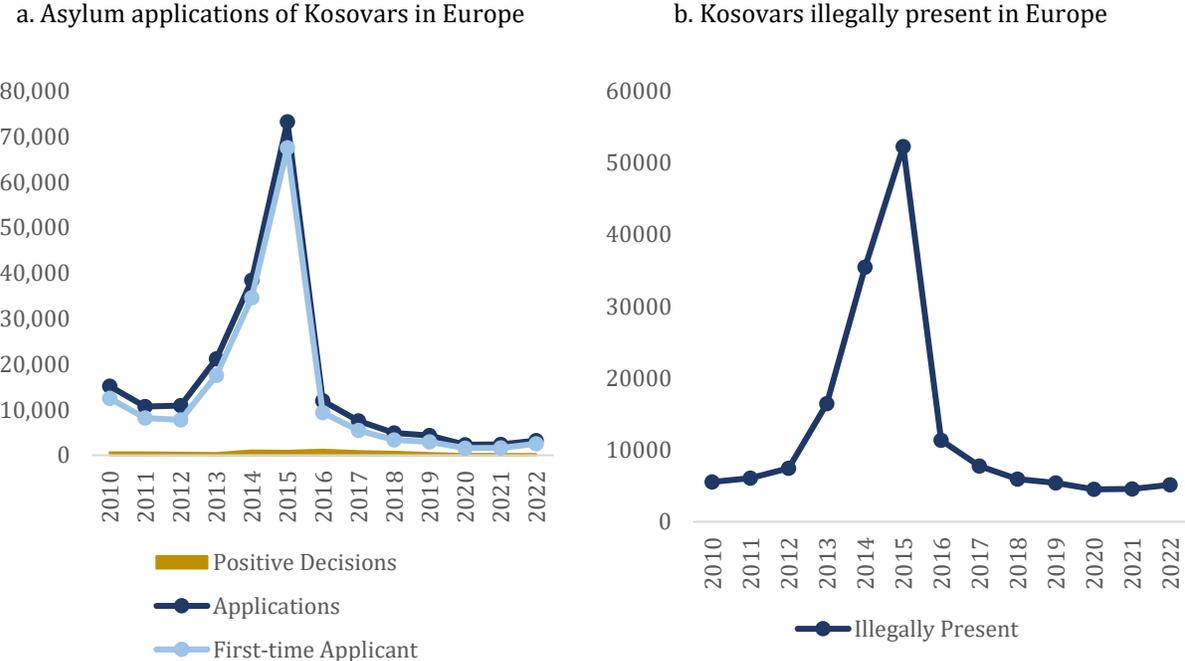
⁴⁸ Hajdari and Krasniqi (2021).

⁴⁹ OECD (2022).

⁵⁰ Kantar and GIZ (2022).

During the middle of the 2010's, there was a sharp but short-lived surge in Kosovar asylum-seekers in the European Union. This surge was not driven by specific humanitarian issues but rather by the underlying political and economic situation in the region. It was also exacerbated by the spread of misinformation, such as that seasonal workers could easily enter Germany or that asylum status was granted to all who entered.⁵¹ The surge in asylum applications for the EU began its acceleration in 2013 and peaked in 2015, before subsiding in the following years (see Figure 10, panel a). The full extent of the increase in migration appears in data beyond asylum applications, as there was a rise in Kosovar citizens who were refused entry at EU borders during this time, an increase which has persisted. At the same time, there was a spike in the number of Kosovars found illegally present in the EU (Figure 10, panel b). The asylum-seeking phenomenon coincided with an increase in transit migrants, many of whom were from Syria, who passed through the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, and headed toward countries in Western Europe.⁵² The increased traffic brought greater awareness to the route and made it easier to follow for Kosovars looking to reach the EU. Together, the surge of emigrating Kosovars (and others from the Western Balkans) and transit migrants fleeing crises in the Middle East formed the so-called “Balkan Route,” a significant migratory pathway toward the European Union.⁵³

Figure 3. Trends in asylum applications and Kosovar migrants illegally present in Europe.



Source: Eurostat.

The majority of migrants from Kosovo can be found in Germany and Switzerland although significant numbers live throughout Europe and other OECD destinations.⁵⁴ The census

⁵¹ OECD (2022).

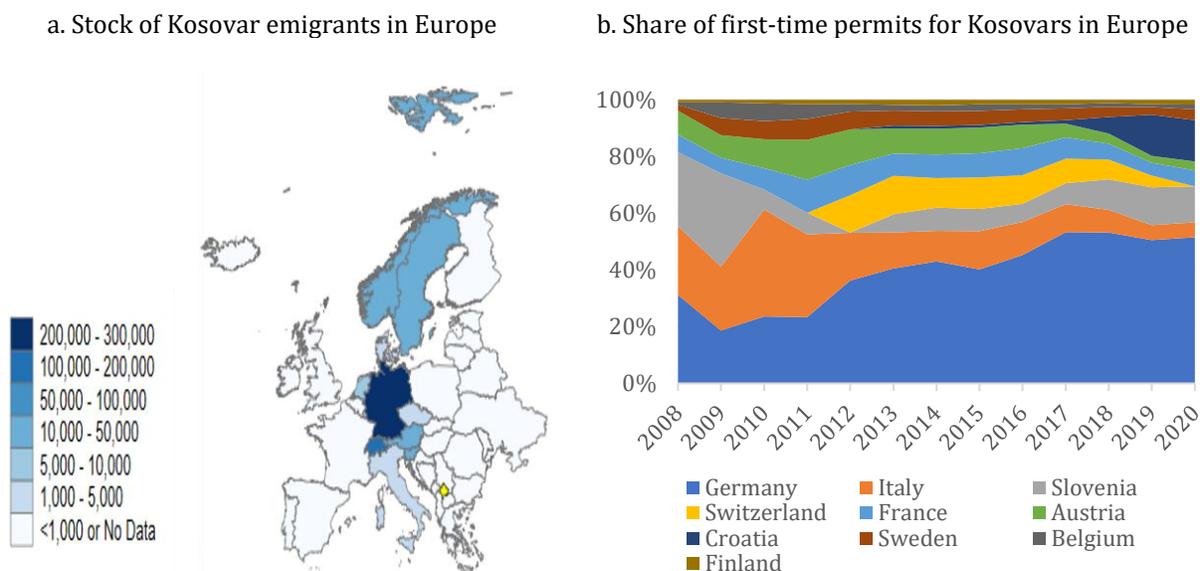
⁵² OECD (2022).

⁵³ IOM (2015).

⁵⁴ Most of the diaspora lives in OECD countries. The OECD estimates that around 500,000 Kosovars were living in OECD countries in 2015, and close to 400,000 of them reside in EU countries. Germany is the largest destination country, hosting around 200,000 Kosovars in 2022 according to Eurostat statistics. Some estimates

conducted in Kosovo in 2011 estimated that 35 percent of all Kosovar emigrants were in Germany, 23 percent were in Switzerland, 7 percent in Italy, 6 percent in Austria, between 2-5 percent in Sweden, USA, France, England, Belgium, and Slovenia, and a final 10 percent who were residing in other destinations.⁵⁵ More recent estimates suggest that Germany and Switzerland have become even more prominent as destinations with over 60 percent of Kosovar migrants residing in those two destinations.⁵⁶ Estimates from the World Bank suggest that more than half of all Kosovar migrants live in Germany alone (see Figure 11, panel a). The most recent data of first-time work permits from Eurostat show that Germany has been attracting an increasing share of Kosovars, representing around half of all the new labor migrant outflows from Kosovo by 2020 (see Figure 11, panel b). Other countries that have become major destinations of Kosovars are Slovenia and Croatia, hosting more than 15 percent of Kosovar workers in 2020. Italy and Switzerland also attract more than 5 percent of Kosovar workers are.

Figure 4. Destination countries in Europe of Kosovar emigrants



Source: KNOMAD/World Bank Bilateral Migration Matrix 2021 and Eurostat.

Note: Data for 2021-22 on first-time permits is not included due to missing data from Germany. Only countries that accounted for two percent or more of first-time permits on average over the time period are included.

Profile of Kosovar emigrants

The typical emigrant from Kosovo is male and of working age, though significant diversity exists. According to the census in 2011, 57 percent of emigrants were male and over 80 percent were of working-age between 15 and 64. Similarly, the profile of Kosovar emigrants in OECD countries is male dominated (55 percent) and highly concentrated among the working-age population (nearly 90 percent). In comparison to other Western Balkan countries, emigrants from Kosovo tend to be younger, with a higher share under the age of 25 and the smallest share of emigrants who are over

increase the total size of the Kosovar diaspora residing in Germany to more than 400,000, although they include second-generation migrants that were already born abroad.

OECD (2022); Eurostat; European Training Foundation (2021)

⁵⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2014).

⁵⁶ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

the age of 65 among the Western Balkan six countries (WB6). The male predominance in emigration is even higher in the most recent round of the World Bank Life in Transition Survey in 2022-23,⁵⁷ at around 80 percent, although these types of surveys tend to capture short-term labor migration episodes more easily, where males usually represent a larger share.

Kosovar emigrants are also more likely to have lower education levels than non-migrants in Kosovo and other migrants from neighboring Western Balkan countries. Over 50 percent of Kosovar emigrants have at most a lower secondary level of education, compared to less than 40 percent of the non-migrant population. Both migrants and non-migrants have similarly low levels of tertiary education (slightly above 10%), while non-migrants are more likely to have medium education levels (around half have upper-secondary education, compared to 35 percent of emigrants). The share of low-educated migrants is marginally higher than in Albania and North Macedonia and significantly higher than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, where the percentage ranges from around 30-40 percent. In some WB6 countries like Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, migrants are more educated than their conational non-migrant peers, but in Kosovo emigrants in the OECD actually have a lower education level than the non-migrant population (see Figure 12). Overall, Kosovo has the lowest percentage of highly educated migrants in OECD destinations among the WB6 countries.⁵⁸ Those who are high-educated are more likely to be male, while women are more likely to be over-represented among low-educated migrants. Over time, recent migrants who arrived in OECD destination countries between 2010 – 2019 are more likely to be low-educated (60 percent) and less likely to be high-educated than those migrants who had settled before 2010.⁵⁹ However, preliminary data from the recent Life in Transition Survey from 2022-2023 suggest these trends may be changing, with more migrants reporting having tertiary education (20 percent).⁶⁰

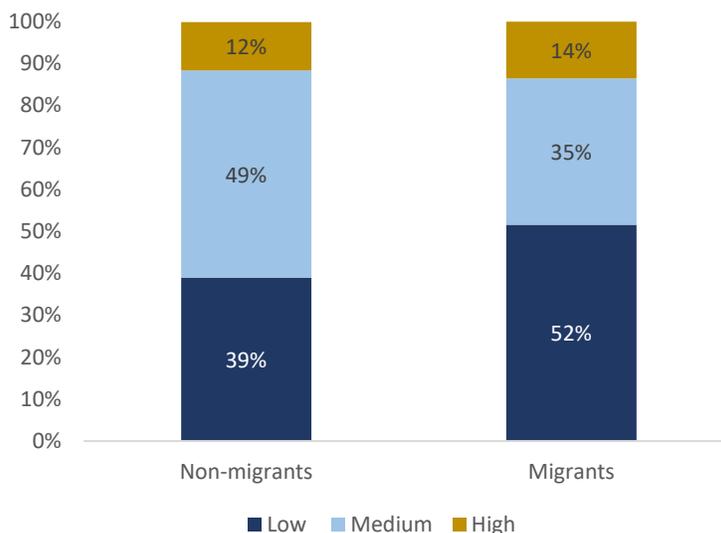
⁵⁷ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

⁵⁸ OECD (2022).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

Figure 5. Education levels of emigrants and non-migrants in Kosovo



Source: OECD (2022).

Note: Migrants refer to migrants from Kosovo living in OECD destinations. Low education refers to 0, 1, or 2 in the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Medium education is ISCED 3/4 and high education includes ISCED 5/6/7/8.

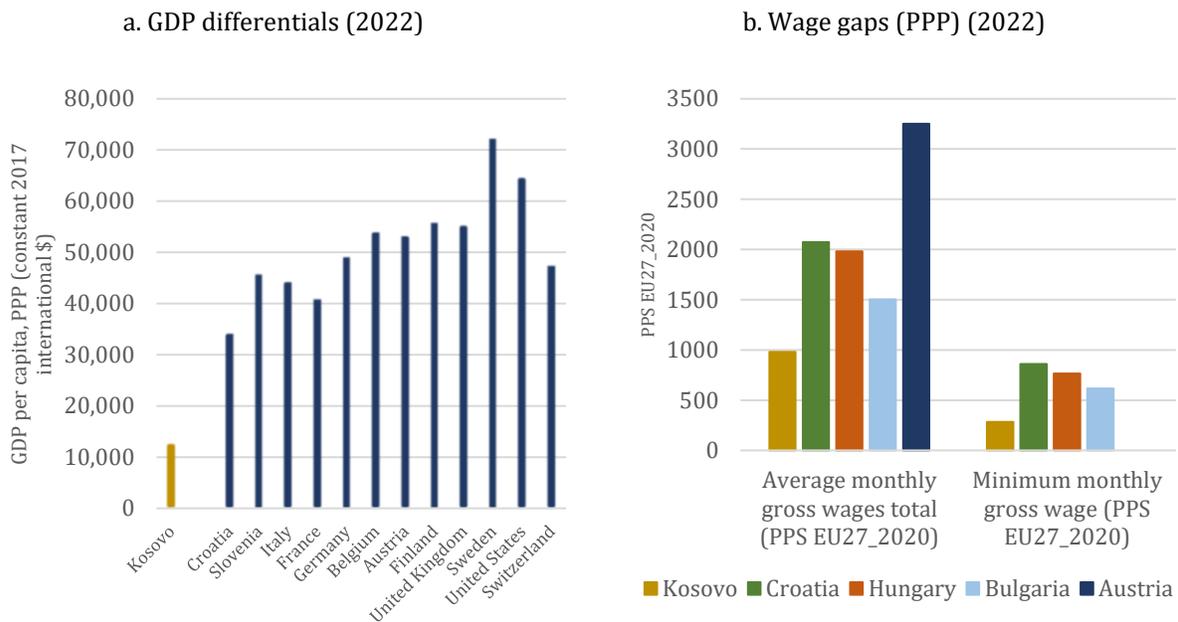
Main drivers of emigration

Despite recent economic progress, significant wage gaps persist between Kosovo and principal destination countries. GDP per capita in Kosovo has been rising consistently, with a minor downturn due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the number of people living in poverty was also on a declining trend, poverty rates and inequality have increased since 2019, especially in rural areas.⁶¹ Vulnerabilities persist, with almost half of household unable to cope with an unexpected expense of 100 Euros using their own resources.⁶² Despite a rising GDP per capita, there is still a significant gap compared to the GDP per capita in main destination countries (see Figure 13, panel a). This translates into migrants having opportunities to earn higher income if working abroad. Average gross wages are more than twice as high in nearby Croatia, and as much as seven times more in Germany or Austria (Figure 13, panel b). Similar patterns are observed in terms of minimum gross wages, for which the gap has actually been widening between Kosovo and other countries.

⁶¹ World Bank (2024).

⁶² European Training Foundation (2021).

Figure 6. Income gaps between Kosovo and main destination countries



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators and SEE Jobs Gateway.

Note: Wage gaps are calculated using PPPs to remove the effect of differences in price levels.

Demographic disparities with respect to main destination countries are also underlying forces for the emigration of Kosovars. Countries that are frequent destinations for Kosovar migrants are marked by rapidly ageing populations. The percentage of people in the EU that are 65 years or older has increased from 18.3 percent in 2013 to 21.3 percent in 2023 and the median age as of January 1st, 2023 was 44.5 years old.⁶³ Ageing is a long-term trend and can be seen in population pyramids for countries like Germany, the principal destination for Kosovar migrants, with a significantly higher share of the population aged 65 and above (see Figure 14). The reduction in the working-age population in these countries increases the demand for foreign workers to fill labor market shortages, among them Kosovar workers. At the same time, Kosovo is one of the youngest countries in Europe and many youth enter the labor market each year.⁶⁴ Based on birth data for the years 2001-2004, the size of the cohorts entering the labor market in recent years averages just over 34,000 people, with smaller cohorts retiring.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, from the years 2015-2018, the economy added 10,000 formal jobs per year, which was around twice as much as from 2011-2014, but not enough to accommodate all new labor market entrants.⁶⁶ This contributes to high youth unemployment rates and creates migration pressures as young people seek opportunities abroad.

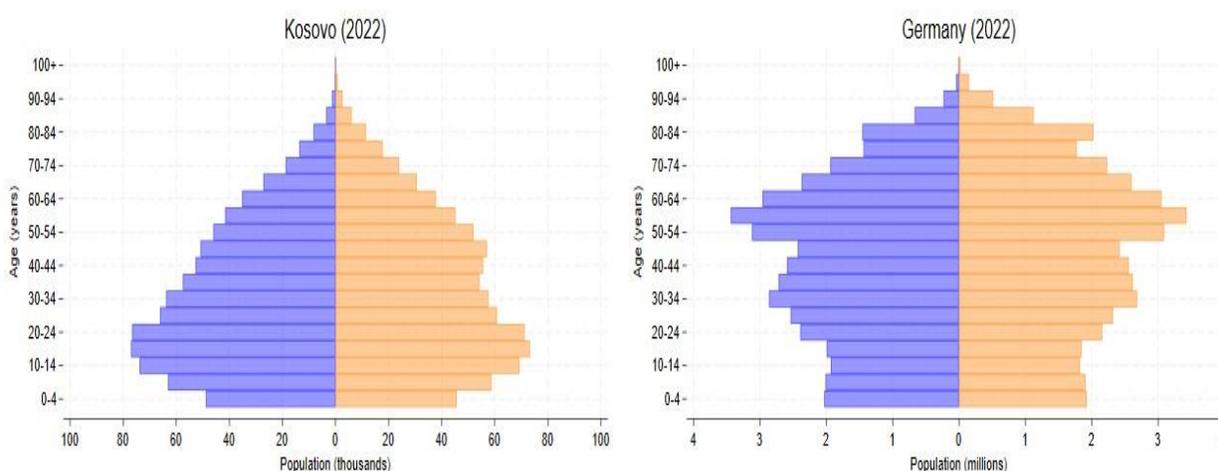
⁶³ European Commission (2024)

⁶⁴ European Training Foundation (2021)

⁶⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (https://askdata.rks.gov.net/pxweb/en/ASKdata/ASKdata_Population_Births%20and%20deaths/birthsDeathsHistory.px/table/tableViewLayout1/)

⁶⁶ World Bank (2021)

Figure 7. Population pyramids show the difference between a young country like Kosovo and an ageing country like Germany.



Source: 2022 data (medium scenario): World Population Prospects (dashboard), Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

The unemployment rate, although declining, remains high, spurring emigration outflows in search for economic opportunities abroad. Unemployment has decreased rapidly in recent years and though it remains high at 10.7 percent in 2022,⁶⁷ compared to around 7 percent for EU and OECD averages, it is significantly lower than the 20 percent observed in 2021 and 25-30 percent in the period of 2016-2020. It also affects workers of all education levels, although particularly so among those with lower education. According to data from the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo in 2022, 45.9 percent of workers without school were unemployed, compared to 20.8 percent for those with only primary education, 14.7 percent for those with vocational secondary education, and 10 percent for those with general secondary or tertiary education.⁶⁸ Youth have a particularly high unemployment rate (21 percent in 2022), although it is down significantly from 38 percent just one year earlier and around 50 to 60 percent in the years 2012-2020. The youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than the rate in EU and OECD countries (16 percent and 11 percent respectively). For women, female labor force participation remains low at less than 20 percent.⁶⁹ Preliminary data from the Life in Transition survey suggest that unemployment has a statistically significant and positive increase of around 20 percentage points on the likelihood for a man in Kosovo to consider moving abroad, but there is not a similar effect for women. Men appear to be most likely to move abroad for ‘job or study reasons,’ while women are most likely to move for marriage or family reunification.⁷⁰

Challenging working conditions also act as an inhibiting factor for quality job opportunities at home. Employment throughout the region is predominantly in low-productivity jobs and few quality private sector jobs are being created. In addition, poor working conditions are prevalent, including lack of contracts and short-term opportunities.⁷¹ Altogether, these factors contribute to a lack of viable and attractive economic opportunities for citizens in Kosovo. An OECD survey in 2021-

⁶⁷ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2023 Q2)

⁶⁸ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2024).

⁶⁹ OECD (2022) and World Development Indicators.

⁷⁰ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

⁷¹ European Training Foundation (2021) and OECD (2022).

2022 of people with current or past migration experience throughout the Western Balkans found that more than half of respondents (55 percent) considered ‘better employment opportunities’ as a ‘very important’ reason to migrate, and another 30 percent said they were ‘important’.⁷² While this survey evidence is regional, the underlying data from Kosovo corroborates the importance of economic push factors for migration.

Factors such as high socioeconomic inequality and the pursuit of better social services are also frequently mentioned as important drivers of migration. In surveys, respondents frequently cite general dissatisfaction with the status quo as a reason for migration and data reveal why it may be the case. Income inequality in Kosovo is greater than the average EU or OECD country, which can lead to disparities in access to public services, especially for ethnic minorities.⁷³ While not specific to Kosovo, a survey of people with past or current migration experience from the Western Balkans found that more than 70 percent reported that better public/social services, pension systems, and health systems were important or very important for their migration decisions.⁷⁴ Looking at spending on healthcare per capita, Kosovo reported spending just over 150 Euros per capita in 2017, which is almost 12 times lower than the EU average.⁷⁵

Changes in migration policies in destination countries in recent years represent an additional factor that drives Kosovar emigration. As populations in the EU continue to age, many EU countries are turning to migration as a solution to growing labor shortages, including through changing policies to increase flows. The European Union as a whole adapted administrative procedures to facilitate the arrival of educational migrants to study in the EU, as well as to facilitate their ability to remain after their studies to work.⁷⁶ In 2017, Austria amended its Law on Settlement and Residence to facilitate more access to the labor market, including for migrants from the Western Balkans. Germany has actively passed new legislation and engaged in bilateral agreements with Kosovo to normalize and create opportunities for labor migration such as the Western Balkan Regulation in 2016 that facilitates a legal labor migration pathway for workers from Kosovo (and other Western Balkan countries) to Germany (see section 2.1.2).⁷⁷ In the first few years from 2016-2019, Germany granted 77,092 pre-approvals for applications from prospective migrants in Kosovo, mainly for jobs in construction, accommodation and food services, and administrative and support services. From 2021-2023 the number of approvals for Kosovars under this regulation totaled 29,803. As a result of these steady inflows, the number of Kosovar workers in Germany increased from 67,020 in 2016 to 135,870 in 2023.⁷⁸

Employment outcomes of Kosovar emigrants

Kosovar migrants leave for better employment opportunities, with employment rates significantly higher while abroad compared to non-migrants. Many migrants go abroad looking for work. In OECD destination countries, the employment rate of Kosovars was 58 percent in 2015, which was similar to the rate for migrants from other WB6 countries, although still lower than the employment rate for all foreign-born migrants in the OECD (67 percent). There is also a significant positive gap in the labor force participation of Kosovar migrants compared to the non-migrant population in Kosovo, both for men and women. Male migrants have a labor force participation rate

⁷² OECD (2022).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Republic of Kosovo (2019c).

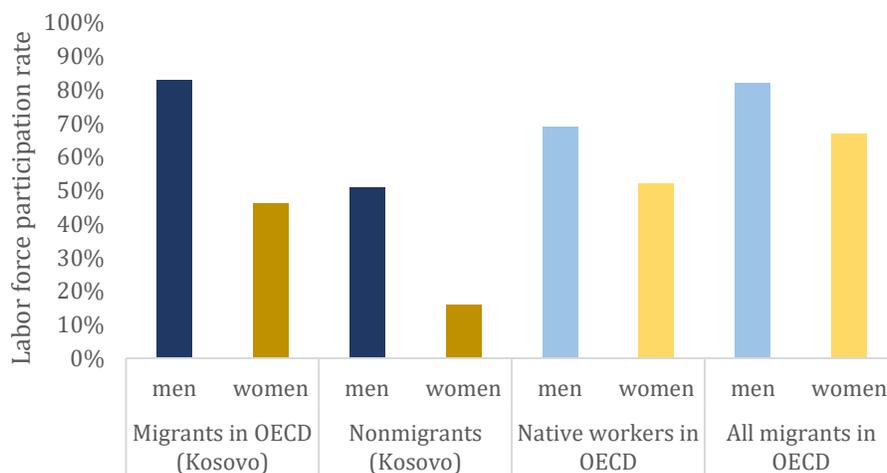
⁷⁶ Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2021).

⁷⁷ See sub-section 2.1.2 for a more detailed discussion on the third country regulations of migration flows.

⁷⁸ <https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/DE/Navigation/Statistiken/Interaktive-Statistiken/Migration-Zuwanderung-Flucht/Migration-Zuwanderung-Flucht-Nav.html>

of 83 percent compared to 51 percent of non-migrants, and female migrants participate at a rate of 46 percent compared to 16 percent of non-migrant women (see Figure 15). Still there is a sizable gender gap in labor force participation among Kosovar migrants (32 percentage points –pp–), which is significantly larger than the gap for native workers in the OECD (16 pp) and that for other WB6 migrants and all foreign-born workers in the OECD (15 pp).⁷⁹

Figure 8. Labor force participation rates of Kosovar migrants, non-migrants in Kosovo, natives in OECD destination countries and other migrants



Source: OECD (2022) and World Development Indicators.

Note: Data are from 2015 for consistent comparison.

Kosovar emigrants tend to be employed in low-skilled occupations, with different sectoral concentrations between men and women. Among those who are employed, more than 50 percent of Kosovar male emigrants and more than 40 percent of female emigrants work in low-skilled jobs (see Figure 16).⁸⁰ This is a higher percentage than migrants from regional neighbors and all foreign-born workers in the OECD. Kosovar male emigrants concentrate in low-skilled occupations in manufacturing and construction sectors while less than ten percent work in higher skilled managerial, professional or technician occupations. Female Kosovar emigrants are even more concentrated in specific sectors, with over 30 percent working as low-skilled cleaners and helpers and 25 percent in sales and services mid-skilled sectors. However, there is also a sizable share of female emigrants working as higher-skilled technicians and associates in the health sector (over 10 percent). Overall, about 61 percent of migrants from Kosovo in the OECD were considered overqualified for the job they had in 2016, which is the highest rate of any of the Western Balkan countries. It also shows an upward trend compared to the previously recorded rate of 55 percent in 2011.⁸¹

⁷⁹ OECD (2022) and World Development Indicators.

⁸⁰ This note defines low skilled jobs as those included in the 7, 8, and 9 ISCO classification (that is, elementary occupations, plant and machinery operators, and craft and related trade workers).

⁸¹ OECD (2022).

Box 1. The case of nurses

Although the average migrant from Kosovo tends to be low-skilled, the healthcare sector offers opportunities for work in higher-skilled occupations, especially for nurses. OECD and other countries with aging populations are experiencing shortages of healthcare personnel and nurses in particular. It is estimated that by the end of the decade, the global demand for health professionals will be double what it was a decade prior.⁸² Meanwhile, in Kosovo, there is a larger number of nurses than vacancies in the country. According to the Chairman of the Federation of Health Unions of Kosovo (FSSHK), around 4,000 nursing students graduate each year from the private system, along with 350 from the public system. On the other hand, fewer than 400 new nurses were employed in 2018 and 1,400 competed for 100 open positions.⁸³ However, the current lower opportunities can be due to limited spending on healthcare and services available to the population and not a low demand of nurses in the country –with a significantly lower share of nurses per capita than in the EU–, which evidence the need of further investment in the system. The expansion in the healthcare demand could thus require more healthcare workforce moving forward.

The emigration of nurses from Kosovo has been increasing in the last years. As of March 2019, there were 7,204 health workers from Kosovo employed in Germany with more on the way. In 2021, the Chamber of Nurses of Kosovo issued 140 certificates required for nurses to emigrate with their qualifications. By September of 2022, they had already issued 586 certificates, representing more than a four-fold increase.⁸⁴ A challenge many nurses from Kosovo who emigrate to countries like Germany face is that they end up underutilizing their skillsets, primarily focusing on the subset of elderly care and in some cases, there are issues with recognitions of skill qualifications.⁸⁵ Following the Covid-19 pandemic, and the higher needs for personnel, many OECD countries initiated new procedures to recognize foreign qualifications and encourage more inflows of nurses. While a minority of nurses is interested in migrating, a survey of migration intentions among healthcare personnel conducted in Kosovo during the Covid-19 pandemic confirmed that one in four nurses reported an increased willingness to migrate since the onset of the pandemic.⁸⁶

⁸² Mara (2023).

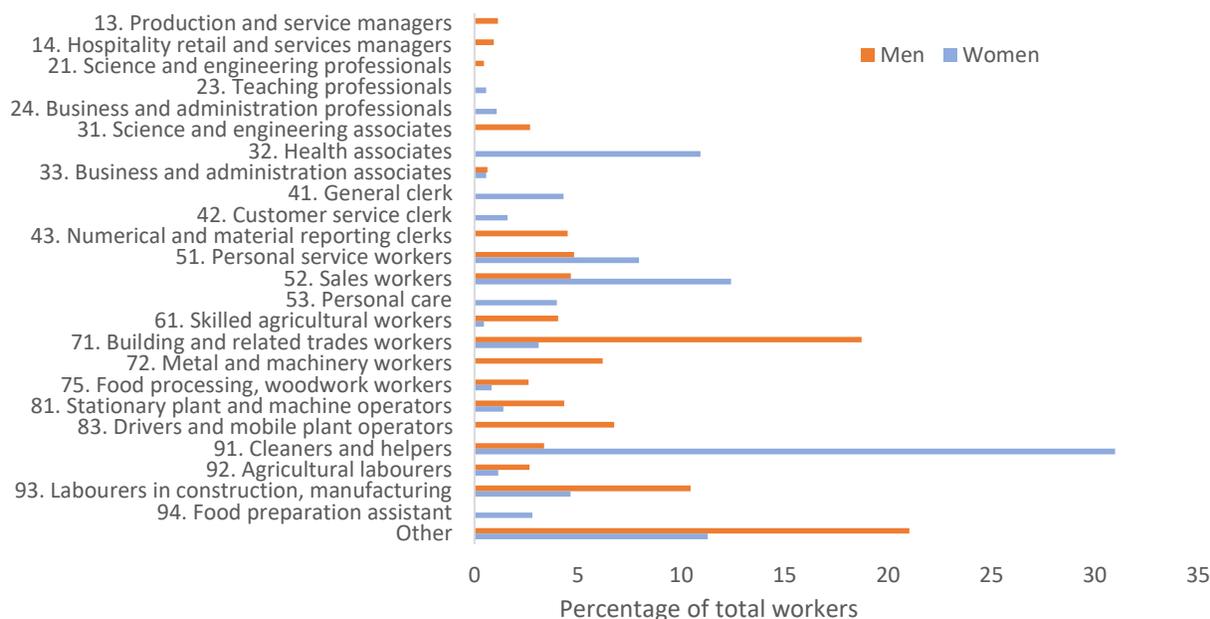
⁸³ GAP Institute (2020).

⁸⁴ Balkans Policy Research Group (2023).

⁸⁵ GAP Institute (2020).

⁸⁶ Murataj et al. (2022).

Figure 9. Occupational profile of male and female Kosovar emigrants in OECD countries



Source: OECD (2022).

Box 2. Kosovar migrants' outcomes in Germany

The implementation of the Western Balkans Regulation (WBR) gives insight into the types of jobs that Kosovar migrants find in Germany. As the main destination country for Kosovar migrants, Germany offers the promise of high levels of employment and good quality of life. The Western Balkan Regulation opened up new opportunities and the majority of pre-approvals for applications were for jobs in construction, accommodation and food services, and administrative and support services. However, for some sectors, approvals still represent a small percentage of job applications, including in financial and insurance activities, activities of households as employers, and human health and social work activities. After nearly a decade of the WBR, 26 percent of all Kosovar employees in Germany work in the construction sector, 14 percent work in administrative and support services, and 13.5 percent work in manufacturing.⁸⁷

The continuing wage gap between Kosovars in Germany and German natives shows how challenges remain to achieve a deeper integration in the host labor market. Migrants who go to Germany earn a higher average wage on average than workers in Kosovo⁸⁸ but they still earn significantly less than German natives. In Germany, native workers earn a monthly average wage

⁸⁷

https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/SiteGlobals/Forms/Suche/Einzelheftsuche_Formular.html?nn=1523088&topic_f=beschaeftigung-eu-heft-eu-heft

⁸⁸ Comparing the wages of migrants with natives from their origin country is difficult in the absence of a natural experiment due to unknown selection bias for those who chose to migrate.

of around 3,500 Euros compared to workers from Kosovo who earn slightly above 2,500 Euros per month on average. The wage gap persists when comparing between workers in jobs at similar skill levels and is higher for higher skilled specialists than it is for support workers. A German 'expert' earns on average just over 5,600 Euros per month compared to a Kosovar expert who earns just under 4,000 Euros.⁸⁹ Kosovar migrants arriving under the WBR earn slightly less on average than workers from other third countries (13 euros per hour) but more than those who arrived seeking asylum from non-Western Balkan countries (10 euros per hour).⁹⁰

Section 1.2. The return of Kosovar emigrants to Kosovo

A significant number of Kosovar emigrants have returned, mostly driven by a majority of those who fled during the war returning soon after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1999.

Return migrants are those nationals that spend some period of time abroad (typically it is measured by a minimum of three months) and then return to their country of origin. A comprehensive estimate of the total number of returned migrants is difficult due to data constraints. The inflow of return Kosovars in the diaspora was concentrated in the arrival of 600,000 forcibly displaced migrants soon after the war,⁹¹ which was unique compared to other examples of mass displacement around the world. Since 1999, IOM has periodically assisted with the return of more than 200,000 Kosovar migrants, most of them forced to return under readmission agreements.⁹² However, some of this population only spent very little time abroad and did not have any work experience. A recent survey conducted in 2022 by Kantar found that 17 percent of the population 18 to 65 had worked abroad, which would suggest a total population of returned migrants (18-65) with international work experience of around 200,000.⁹³

Migrants continue to return every year though at less significant levels, aside from a spike in 2015 associated with the return of rejected asylum seekers. Migrants' return can be captured in data in different ways: while some are registered when changing their residency after returning from years abroad, others are registered through data on readmissions - those forced to return due to their irregular migration. Aside from the peak of return in 1999, residence statistics suggest that around four to five thousand migrants historically have returned each year.⁹⁴ In the last decade, the average number of those returning to their residence in Kosovo has grown to around 8,500, though in most years the average has remained around five to six thousand. Trends show two clear spikes: the largest one in 2015-16, due to the increase in returns of rejected asylum-seekers; a more moderate increase occurred in 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19 which limited employment opportunities in destination countries (see Figure 17, panel a). Forced return drastically increased when Germany declared Kosovo and the Western Balkans as "safe countries of origin," leading to the rejection of asylum claims and expediting the return of many migrants (see Figure 10 for evidence of low

⁸⁹ European Training Foundation (2021).

⁹⁰ Brücker et al. (2020).

⁹¹ OECD (2022).

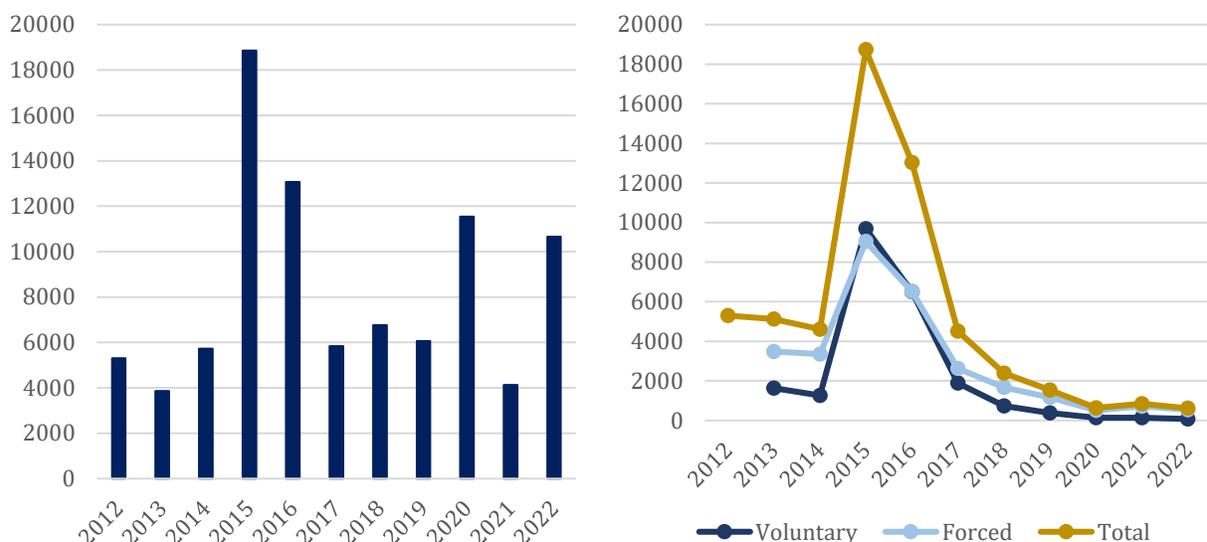
⁹² IOM Kosovo.

⁹³ Kantar and GIZ (2022).

⁹⁴ Numbers based on changes in residency cover all people that had a last residency abroad, which includes both Kosovars returning home and foreign immigrants arriving to the country. However, the vast majority of these numbers (around 97 percent) are reported to be returning Kosovars.

acceptance rate).⁹⁵ These migrants who had the option of voluntary or forced readmission, returned in larger numbers during the peak years of asylum-seeking 2015-2016 (see Figure 17, panel b).⁹⁶

Figure 10. Total returns and statistics on return migration from readmission agreements



Source: Government Authority on Migration (2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2021; 2023) and Eurostat.

Profile of return migrants

According to the census in 2011, the majority of migrants who return come back from a restricted group of countries. Germany by itself accounted for more than 30 percent of those who were identified as returning from abroad, and Serbia and Switzerland accounted for nearly 15 percent each.⁹⁷ The higher share of returnees from Germany and Switzerland is in line with the larger emigration rates to those countries. Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, although not typical emigration destinations, still accounted for a significant percentage of returning migrants,⁹⁸ a pattern that was impacted by the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia. The most recent data on returning migrants from 2021 suggests that the majority are returning from Germany (53 percent), followed by Switzerland (17 percent), and France (8 percent), including migrants who are readmitted voluntarily and by force.⁹⁹ While available statistics do not allow for following migrants over time to directly assess who is more likely to return, census data on emigration and return can provide an approximation. Based on that, the propensity to return among migrants varies by destination country, with migrants in Germany being on average more likely to return to Kosovo than migrants from Switzerland. These results are also corroborated when looking at more recent statistics.

⁹⁵ OECD (2022).

⁹⁶ Importantly, readmission totals do not account for all returning migrants but rather those who return as a result of readmission agreements, assisted return, or self-identification.

⁹⁷ The census does not distinguish the nationality of returnees, so a percentage of these people could be foreign immigrants. However, the number of foreign immigrants tends to be relatively minor.

⁹⁸ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2011).

⁹⁹ Government Authority on Migration (2021).

Although data limitations make it difficult to have a clear profile of returning migrants, they are more likely to be young and male reflecting emigration patterns, and their education levels depend on the population group. The population who had previously resided abroad identified by the 2011 census, of which 97 percent were Kosovar citizens returning from abroad, was 61 percent male. Those who were returning from further destinations like Germany and Switzerland were even more likely to be male, while returning migrants from neighboring countries were more likely to be female. In terms of age, half of returning migrants were under the age of 40 years old. The recent Kantar/GIZ survey from 2022¹⁰⁰ supports the findings from the 2011 census and suggests that returning migrants are even more male-dominated than previously found, with men accounting for 79 percent of returnees. In terms of age, the likelihood of return decreases with age until the age of 29, and then return becomes more likely as the migrant gets older (Kosovo Migration Survey of 2009). Education levels of the return migrant population vary depending on the group targeted by different surveys. On the one hand, surveys addressing rejected asylum seekers that had to return to Kosovo after the peak wave of 2014-15 show that this population group had lower levels of education than Kosovo overall and only on average around 9 years of schooling (lower secondary).¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the more recent data on return economic migrants show higher education levels (nearly 40 percent of returned migrants had a university education), particularly so among those that migrated for shorter periods of time.¹⁰² The Kosovo Migration Survey of 2009 also found that 10 percent of migrants acquired higher education abroad and those who did were more likely to return.¹⁰³

Drivers of return migration

The decision to return depends both on the outcomes in destination countries as well as on the strength of connections to Kosovo, whether through family or investment potential. According to the Kosovo Migration Survey from 2009, migrants' likelihood of return was reduced with longer stays in their country of destination and acquiring residential status abroad. On the other hand, factors that incentivized migrants' return decisions were greater family connections in Kosovo and increased expectations to invest in a business upon return. Another survey of a representative sample of 1,600 households conducted in 2012 found that households who had emigrated during the war were three times as likely to return as other households who emigrated, all else equal. However, it similarly found that those who gained citizenship abroad were only 30 percent as likely to return as those who do not.¹⁰⁴ Finally, a survey conducted in 2022 of returned migrants found that 50 percent returned because they were forced to, 10 percent returned for family, and the rest returned after not having found the jobs, accommodation, or conditions they had hoped for.¹⁰⁵

Economic outcomes of return migrants in Kosovo

Return migrants tend to have worse employment outcomes upon return than non-migrant Kosovars, highlighting additional barriers they face to reintegrate into the Kosovar economy. According to the Life in Transition Survey IV of 2023, working age adults that had returned to Kosovo from abroad in the last ten years are less likely to be employed in Kosovo compared to those that did not move (Figure 18). This is true for both men and women. At the same time unemployment rates were significantly higher for returnees.

¹⁰⁰ Kantar and GIZ (2022).

¹⁰¹ Möllers et al. (2017).

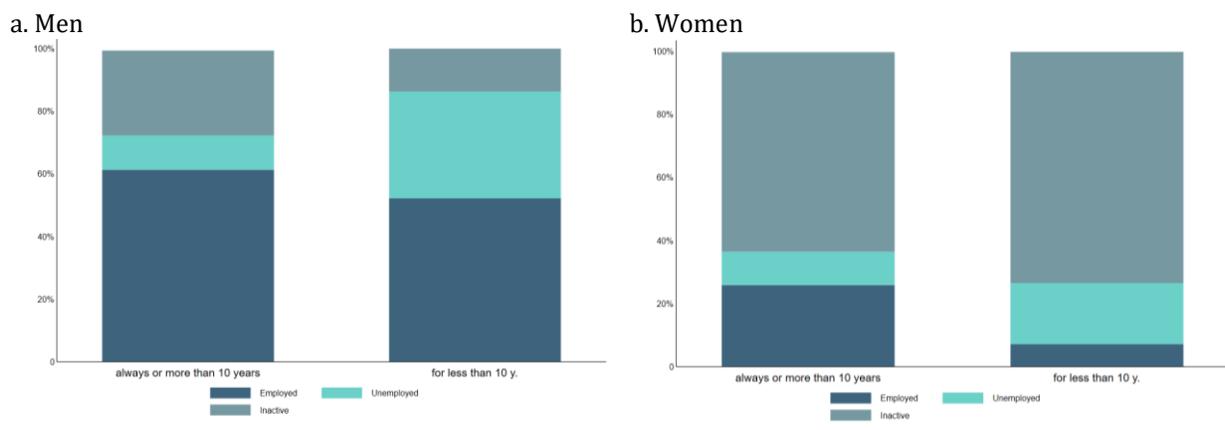
¹⁰² Kantar and GIZ (2022).

¹⁰³ Gashi and Adnett (2015).

¹⁰⁴ Kotorri (2017).

¹⁰⁵ Kantar and GIZ (2022).

Figure 11. Labor force status of returnees and non-migrants in Kosovo (15-64 years old)



Source: Life in Transition Survey IV (2023).

Note: Non-migrants are classified as those who have been in Kosovo 'always or for longer than 10 years.' Return migrants are those who have been in Kosovo for 'less than 10 years.'

While some migrants return for new opportunities and bring capital gained abroad, many return after an unsuccessful migration experience and facing challenging circumstances abroad. Migrants often identify lack of employment or dissatisfaction with employment as a driving factor for migration, so in the instances when they return without having found the opportunity they were looking for, they are thrust back into the same difficult economic situations.¹⁰⁶ In some cases, returnees may even return with lower income levels than when they left after having sold possessions or borrowed money to pay for the costs of migration.¹⁰⁷ In a survey conducted to rejected asylum seekers who returned after migrating in 2014-2015, respondents were asked about their perception of their income level before and after migration. While most perceived themselves as low-income both before and after migration, almost 25 percent identified their households as being lower on an income scale after returning than they were prior to having left. The majority of returned migrants considered their situation to be relatively unchanged and 20 percent believed their situation had improved.^{108,109}

In addition to economic hardship, returned migrants may also face bureaucratic challenges that limit their reintegration potential. These challenges include recognition of education credentials and perceptions of encountering corruption in necessary bureaucratic tasks. Return migrants have also reported high levels of dissatisfaction with their life, with more than one third having depressive symptoms.¹¹⁰ A majority of returnee respondents, believe their condition after

¹⁰⁶ Arenliu and Weine (2016).

¹⁰⁷ Ott (2015).

¹⁰⁸ Möllers et al. (2017).

¹⁰⁹ The experiences of migrants who return are often a product of the time period and context in which they migrated. This is because the composition of migrants, the reasons for migration, and the labor market contexts in destination countries have been changing, which impacts the experiences migrants have and will be reflected in data from different periods.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

return were worse than pre-migration, and 36 percent reported their general health deteriorated.¹¹¹ Among asylum seekers, the process of seeking asylum can be highly stressful and the negative psychological toll that comes with it can lead to particular challenges in reintegration upon return. Refugees who were forced to flee during the war and later returned to Kosovo reported high levels of PTSD for years after their return.¹¹² Other returnees may face discrimination or alienation by their peers, although this occurs in relatively rare cases.¹¹³ Returnees, especially those who are forcibly returned, are often likely to migrate again when they struggle to reintegrate. In the same survey, 40 percent of respondents said that their probability of staying in Kosovo was 20 percent or lower. Only 25 percent reported that they were 80 percent or more likely to stay.¹¹⁴ With regards to reintegration, migrants from minority groups like the Roma face even more extreme difficulties. Children are especially vulnerable, and many drop out of school in part because they do not have access to education in their mother tongue.¹¹⁵

Section 1.3. The impacts of emigration in Kosovo

Migration is often a poverty alleviation strategy for Kosovar families, as the increased wages earned abroad are partly channeled through remittances back home. The remittances that can be sent back to Kosovo are a key factor for emigration in order to support families who remain in the country. The preliminary Life in Transition survey data suggest that around 80 percent of migrants have ever sent remittances.¹¹⁶ Internationally, remittances have been shown to reduce poverty, increase savings, smooth consumption for families, and facilitate investment in productive assets and human capital.¹¹⁷ In Kosovo, evidence shows that migration led to an average income increase of around 690 Euros per year among migrant households, and 41 percent of all households that would have been in poverty in the absence of remittances were lifted out of poverty.¹¹⁸

The scale and prevalence of remittances in Kosovo suggest that they continue to have an important impact on household income. In 2023, the total amount of remittances that Kosovar households received reached an estimated \$1.9 billion. This accounted for 18 percent of GDP, which places Kosovo among the top 15 countries worldwide¹¹⁹ for remittances as a percentage of GDP.¹²⁰ According to the Balkan Barometer survey, the percentage of households in Kosovo receiving remittances was as high as 63 percent in 2022.¹²¹ This share is significantly higher than the share of the population receiving social assistance and the average amount received from remittances is also significantly higher than the average values from social protection programs.¹²²

Despite their important impact on Kosovo's economy and household consumption, remittances are limited by high costs and are not typically channeled toward productive investments. Though remittances are a key source of income for many families, the cost of sending them is typically around 5-7 percent from main destinations, which is significantly higher than the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Arenliu and Weine (2016).

¹¹³ Möllers et al. (2017) and Vieru (2015).

¹¹⁴ Möllers et al. (2017).

¹¹⁵ Vieru (2015) and Möllers et al. (2017).

¹¹⁶ World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.

¹¹⁷ Adams and Page (2005).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Excluding countries with populations under 1 million people.

¹²⁰ World Bank-KNOMAD, December 2023.

¹²¹ Regional Cooperation Council (2022a).

¹²² Möllers and Meyer (2014).

SDG goal of 3 percent and acts as a barrier for migrants to send money.¹²³ The remittances that are sent to Kosovo are primarily used for consumption, especially consumer goods, but also sometimes for health expenses and, to a lower extent, for educational purposes.^{124,125} When remittances are channeled toward investment, it is often for real estate, while investments in the productive economy and entrepreneurship are more limited. In fact, a significant portion of real estate investments in Kosovo come from the diaspora.¹²⁶ Some estimates suggest that nearly half (47 percent) of diaspora investments were in the construction sector and 26 percent were directly into real estate.¹²⁷

The existence of a large diaspora, as is the case with Kosovo, can have significant development impacts beyond remittances. The impact can occur both after return of the diaspora or current emigrants' engagement in the domestic economy through a variety of channels such as knowledge transfers and collaborations in research, transfers of new technologies, building of global networks, direct investments in the local economy, or remittances. All of these channels can spur development outcomes like entrepreneurship, business and job creation, or productivity. Evidence in Kosovo from business owners that migrated in the past shows that the vast majority (90 percent) gained valuable experience, knowledge, skills, or education abroad that helped them establish their business. Also, one in five said that their workers had also gained experience, skills, or knowledge from abroad.¹²⁸ Another survey of returned migrant business owners found that one third brought their business idea from abroad.¹²⁹ A survey of 500 business owners in Kosovo found that around 25 percent opened with financial support from the diaspora and significant share highlighted the importance of creating links with companies abroad, knowledge and education, or professional skills.¹³⁰

On the other hand, net migration outflows are one factor that contributes to the overall decreasing trend in total population in Kosovo, particularly among the those of working age. Kosovo has recorded large net population outflows for nine of the last ten years,¹³¹ with the exception being 2020, the year that Covid-19 dramatically impacted mobility in many ways. This can be seen reflected in the decreasing overall population, with a significant decrease among those age 15-24, who are disproportionately likely to migrate (see Figure 20). The most significant decrease can be seen in children 0-14, which stands in contrast to increases among the 50+ demographic. Taken together, these trends suggest that net negative migration, combined with lower fertility, will contribute to a reduction in the working-age population – which can be seen in future projections from the United Nations.¹³²

¹²³ OECD (2022).

¹²⁴ World Bank (2022).

¹²⁵ Given limited data availability, the evidence on the use of remittances in Kosovo is based on self-reported data on spending and not regression analysis. This creates limitations in assessing the use of remittances due to recollection errors and the potential changes in spending of other sources of income as a response to receiving remittances.

¹²⁶ OECD (2022).

¹²⁷ GERMIN (2023b).

¹²⁸ Haxhikadrija (2009).

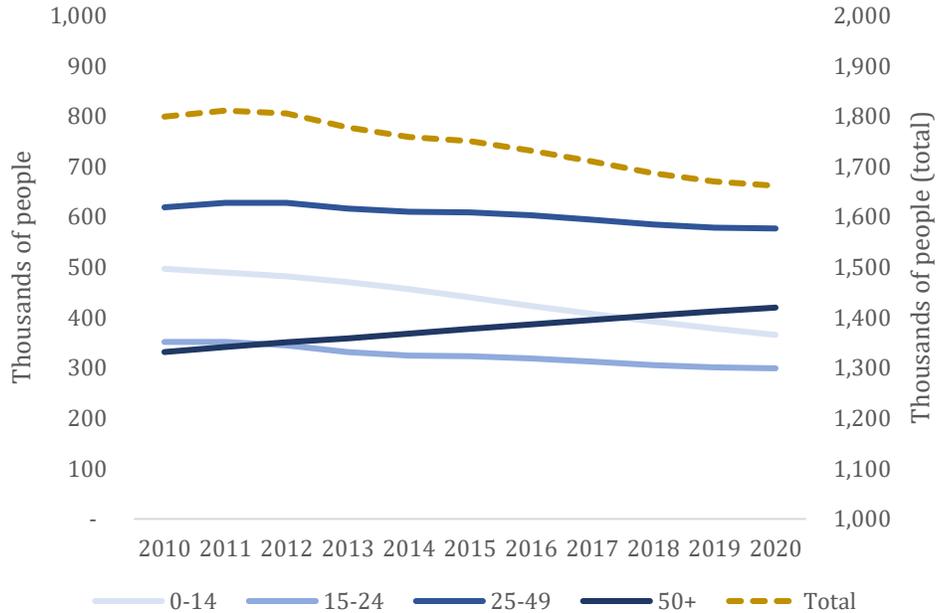
¹²⁹ Möllers et al. (2017).

¹³⁰ Haxhikadrija (2009).

¹³¹ Government Authority on Migration (2018a); (2023).

¹³² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

Figure 12. The reduction in the total population in Kosovo is primarily driven by young people



Source: United Nations Population Prospects 2022.

There are concerns that migration can lead to ‘brain drain’ in Kosovo, through the outmigration of human capital, especially in specific sectors and in the short-term. The emigration of workers that were trained in the country can signify a loss of human capital, at least in the short term. According to the Balkan Business Barometer of 2021, 37 percent of businesses believe that emigration of the workforce was a reason for unfilled job vacancies.¹³³ ‘Brain drain’ is perhaps most importantly discussed in the context of specific sectors (see Box 1 on nurses). Although the majority of emigrants are low-skilled, there are certain sectors in which high-skill emigration is notable. In the medical sector, which carries significant emigration potential, Kosovo only has 170 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants, which is lower than other countries in the region and significantly lower than the EU average of 372. Since 2018, 826 medical professionals have withdrawn their certifications in anticipation of departure, with 152 doing so in 2023.¹³⁴ This figure represents one fourth of the total number of physicians in the country. At the same time, the issue is complicated by the sizable unemployment rate of doctors (590 unemployed in 2023¹³⁵) in Kosovo in part due to budget constraints, which suggests that some available human capital in the country is not productively used, and that higher investment in the healthcare system could increase the availability of vacancies in the medical sector.¹³⁶ Overall, the emigration of human capital may represent a significant fiscal loss for the country in the short-term. An estimate of the total annual monetary cost of educating emigrants reaches between 180-205 million Euros¹³⁷ and that fiscal cost

¹³³ OECD (2022).

¹³⁴ Hashani et al. (2024).

¹³⁵ Hashani et al. (2024).

¹³⁶ European Training Foundation (2021).

¹³⁷ Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2021).

is not returned through earned income within the country if people have left. Other potential costs that can be incurred by emigration are foregone consumption in the local economy, fewer taxes paid, and lower productivity and innovation.

Evidence suggests that when properly managed with well-designed policies, ‘brain drain’ can become ‘brain gain’ in the longer term, even for key sectors. Emigration can become a source for growth of human capital in two ways. Families who receive remittances can increase the resources they allocate to education for family members who do not migrate. Also, individuals can choose to accumulate more human capital if prospects of migration increase the returns to education, even if many of them do not end up migrating. Evidence from the Philippines, a country with high levels of emigration, has shown that in response to increased opportunities to migrate as nurses around the world, the country expanded nursing education programs and more people chose to train as nurses. For each nurse that emigrated, nine new nurses were licensed in the country, significantly increasing the human capital in the country, leading to a ‘brain gain.’¹³⁸ In fact, there is evidence that this has occurred within Kosovo as well. The Heimerer College is a school that provides training and migration opportunities in the health sector for Kosovar students. While some students do migrate through the ‘abroad track,’ data from the college show that 80 percent of those who are employed after graduation remain in Kosovo.¹³⁹ Through its programs, the Heimerer College has increased human capital in the health sector in Kosovo,¹⁴⁰ as well as built healthcare vocational training capacity and helped the Ministry of Health add new sectors to its training priorities. It has created both supply and demand for new health profiles in Kosovo – for example, a new autism clinic provides services that previously did not exist to 300 families in Kosovo.¹⁴¹

Migration can have complex and counteracting impacts on the labor market in Kosovo. High levels of emigration have the potential to generate labor shortages in certain sectors and skill groups, depending on who leaves and who stays. However, it can also alleviate pressure in the labor market if there are significantly more workers than jobs. In Kosovo, unemployment rates have significantly fallen over the last decade, coinciding with continuous outmigration flows. Another potential effect of emigration on the labor market is its potential to further lower labor supply through the support of remittances.¹⁴² There is literature globally, as well as specifically from Kosovo, demonstrating that the inflow of remittances can increase the reservation wages of household members left behind, reducing their participation in the labor market.¹⁴³ In the case of Kosovo, given that emigrants are more likely to be male than female, emigration has the potential to further dampen the labor force participation of women, through the additional income coming from remittances.

The total is calculated beginning with government and household expenditures on education from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, which are used to calculate a cost ‘per pupil’ for each education level (4,700 Euros for nine years of primary education, 6,100 for upper secondary, and 9,700 for graduate education). These costs are applied to the average annual emigration outflow assuming an age structure of emigrants based on the overall population and an education breakdown based on data from a UNDP survey.

¹³⁸ Abarcar and Theoharides (2024).

¹³⁹ Beqiri (2024).

¹⁴⁰ According to health statistics from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the number of nurses certified by the Chamber of Nurses has increased from around 12,000 in 2018 to over 30,000 in 2022.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² OECD (2022).

¹⁴³ Rudi (2014) and Petreski (2019).

Chapter II. Diagnostic of the Legislative and Institutional Migration Infrastructure in Kosovo

This chapter provides an overview of the migration system in Kosovo, from the standpoint of emigration. It looks at the migration system that regulates the flows of emigrants from Kosovo to third countries and the provision of services from the time they plan to migrate, to the time they reside abroad, until they return to Kosovo. A study of the migration system built in Kosovo to govern the flow of foreign-born immigrants into the country, including both economic migrants and asylum seekers and refugees, their selection, conditions to stay, and services provided to facilitate their long-term integration can be found in Annex 2.

Section 2.1. Emigration from Kosovo

2.1.1. Framework to analyze the emigration system

The system that governs emigration throughout the migration lifecycle can be assessed according to a common framework (see figure 21). At the top of the migration system lies the governance structure. On the one hand, this includes all national strategies, domestic laws and bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate the movement of migrant workers between Kosovo and other countries, migrants' rights and responsibilities, as well as the ties, engagement and services that the country provides to its diaspora. Unilateral regulations of labor mobility in destination countries can also have profound repercussions on emigration flows in sending countries such as Kosovo and, thus, also need to be included as part of the legal framework of analysis. The governance structure also covers the institutional setting which, based on national strategies and legal documents governing emigration such as diaspora laws, establishes roles and responsibilities of different domestic agencies as well as coordination mechanisms between them.

Emigration consists of several phases that present different challenges for migrants and require support measures to enhance the overall benefits of migration while reducing its risks. In each of the stages of migration, migrants face certain barriers and challenges, from the point where prospective migrants start considering migrating to another country, to the time they spend abroad, until they return to Kosovo and integrate back into the domestic economy (or decide to re-migrate –e.g., circular migration).

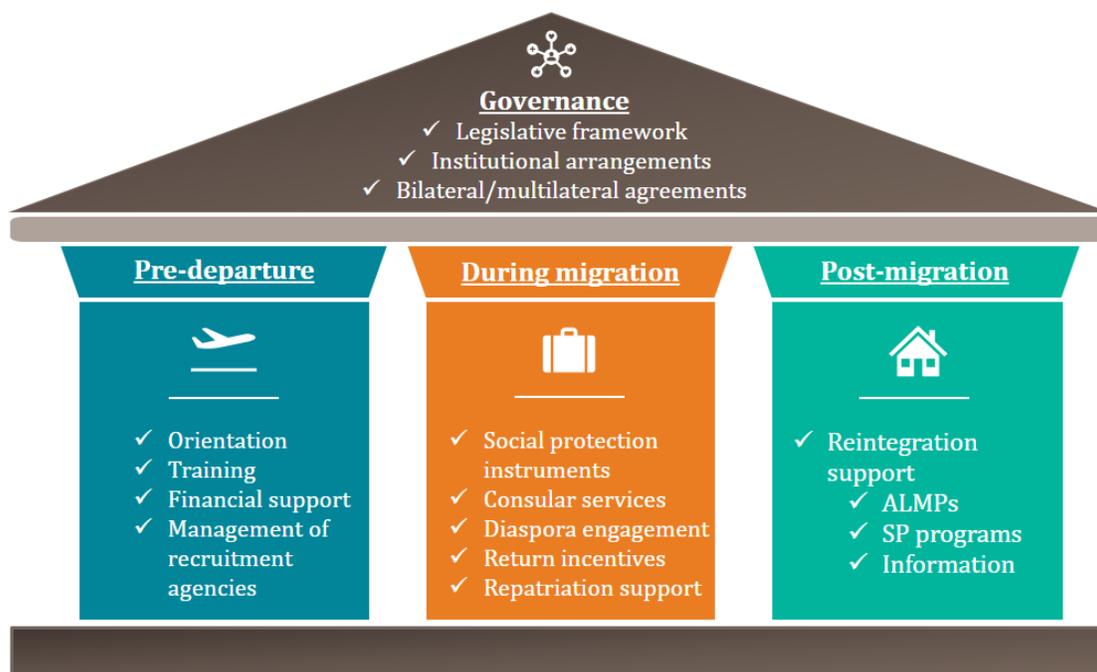
Pre-departure services and regulations can help migrants better prepare for the migration experience. Before departing, potential migrants often have information asymmetries with respect to employment opportunities and the migration process, skills mismatches with what job opportunities demand at destination (particularly host language fluency) and financial constraints that limit their ability to finance the upfront costs of migration. To better prepare prospective migrants and avoid misinformation, well-developed emigration systems provide different services such as orientation sessions that include information on job vacancies and legal and bureaucratic requirements to migrate, financial support, or training programs. Best practices also include thorough regulations and management of recruitment agencies to protect migrants' rights and avoid abuses.

During the migration period, services that protect migrants against shocks, enhance social and economic engagement of the diaspora and incentivize return, can significantly improve the gains of migration for migrants and Kosovo alike. While migrants can largely benefit from

larger income opportunities in destination countries, they are also more exposed to negative shocks as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advanced migration systems provide a range of services to their citizens abroad, including consular services, emergency relief, or access to insurance funds to cover them in the event of negative shocks. To enhance the benefits of emigration, another important aspect is strengthening the broader engagement with the diaspora by building trust, improving the business environment, and deepening the outreach efforts in order to benefit from the expansion of global networks, the channeling of investments and the transfer of know-how to the domestic economy. In order to incentivize return migration, some governments provide tax exemptions and other financial incentives and repatriation support (such as travel costs or temporary housing allowances), as well as information on job opportunities in the home country.

Upon return to Kosovo, interventions can support migrants’ reintegration into the home economy. Return migrants, particularly the most vulnerable such as those forced to return or those that unexpectedly return without achieving their migration saving or education targets, can face certain re-integration barriers and challenges. Migration policy can provide reintegration support for those most in need, including one-stop shops providing information on different services and employment opportunities, and facilitating activation through ALMPs.

Figure 13. Framework to analyze the system of migration and return of Kosovars



Following this framework, sub-section 2.1.2 assesses the body of legislation that governs and affects emigration in Kosovo, including national strategies, domestic laws, bilateral agreements and third-country regulations. Sub-section 2.1.3 studies the institutional organization of all different agencies in Kosovo with roles and responsibilities to regulate or provide services to emigrants. Sub-section 2.1.4 analyzes the provision of services throughout the migration life cycle, including pre-departure, during migration and upon return to Kosovo.

2.1.2. Legislative framework regulating migration of Kosovars

Kosovo's legislative framework is built around the National Strategy on Migration 2021-2025, which recognizes the importance of emigration for the country's development trajectory. The strategy was developed in parallel with the National Development Strategy and seeks to address long-term socioeconomic challenges, importantly recognizing the relevance of migration for development. Of the strategy's four main objectives, several focus on the emigration and return of Kosovars. The first strategic objective relates to regular migration management and specifically includes measures to reduce the irregular emigration of Kosovars and strengthen the sustainable reintegration of returnee migrants. The second strategic objective aims to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration through measures to enhance cooperation with other countries. The final strategic objective focuses on advancing in the field of migration management and strengthening of the international protection system. It includes measures to enhance cooperation and data management to build capacity and evidence-based decision-making, including on emigration.¹⁴⁴ The allocated budget for the implementation of the strategy, which is equivalent to 21 million USD PPP, is in line with other Western Balkan countries. Donors play an important role, providing 27 percent of funds through support from GIZ (DIMAK) and Switzerland/ICMPD (MIMAK).¹⁴⁵

The National Strategy on Migration includes mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation to ensure the completion of stated objectives. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Government Authority on Migration are the main actors in charge of both implementation and also preparation of monitoring and reporting arrangements. Reporting will come in the form of biannual progress reports, which follow the implementation plan and provide information on progress, as well as identifying challenges and risks. There will also be annual progress reports, which are similar, but will inform the mid-term review of the Action Plan and will be put toward the next Strategy on Migration 2026-2030.¹⁴⁶

In addition to the National Strategy on Migration, other government strategies have played and continue to play an important role in the overall framework for the emigration and return of Kosovars. One example is the State Strategy against Organized Crime 2018-2022, which established additional protocols to address issues related to the trafficking of humans and the movement of contraband with migrants. Specific objectives focused on increasing capacity, raising awareness in Kosovo, utilizing new technology, and increasing inter-institutional, regional, and international cooperation.¹⁴⁷ The National Strategy Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2022-2026 is also now in effect, which recognizes the complexity and transnational nature of the problem and its roots in drivers of migration. It includes objectives on the prevention of trafficking and the protection and reintegration of victims, among others.¹⁴⁸ The State Strategy on Integrated Border Management 2020-2025 is also vital for migration and focuses on designing a system that ensures open but well-controlled, secure, and 'effective' borders for the free and legitimate movement of people and goods but prevents cross-border crime and protects the health of citizens.¹⁴⁹

Kosovo's legislative framework for migration is aligned with international standards and has been influenced by other global and regional initiatives. A study conducted by GIZ found that the legal and strategic framework in place in Kosovo is harmonized 'to a significant extent' with the

¹⁴⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁴⁵ OECD (2022).

¹⁴⁶ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁴⁷ Republic of Kosovo (2018d).

¹⁴⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2022).

¹⁴⁹ Republic of Kosovo (2020b).

objectives of the Global Compact on Migration.¹⁵⁰ The National Strategy also contains recommendations to further include objectives and indicators from the Global Compact, including establishing a common platform for data exchange and creating a system to further develop human capital through reintegration.

The migration of Kosovars within the region is also affected by Kosovo's endorsement of the Common Regional Market 2021-2024 Action Plan, which aims to implement freedom of movement and remove the need for work permits between the Western Balkans. The plan includes three agreements to improve regional mobility: the mutual recognition of ID cards, the recognition of university degrees, and the recognition of professional qualifications.¹⁵¹ Visa-free movement with Montenegro and Albania has been important for temporary and seasonal migration opportunities and this plan would increase regional options. The action plan includes measures that aim to create a regional trade area for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. It also aims to create a regional investment area aligned with EU standards, as well as digital, industrial, and innovation areas that will further align and integrate the Western Balkans with each other and with EU markets and standards.¹⁵²

Outside the region, the ongoing process of visa liberalization with the European Union has had important influence on the evolution of Kosovo's legislative framework for managing the migration of Kosovars. Underway since 2012, the process for visa liberalization has focused on the need to align systems between Kosovo and the EU and to assure the EU that post-liberalization migration flows will be managed. As part of the process, the Government Authority on Migration was established and has conducted outreach to Kosovar citizens about the rights and obligations that come with visa liberalization. Based on recognized progress, in 2016, the European Commission proposed that Kosovo be included in visa-free travel and set it to enter into effect on January 1st, 2024, giving Kosovars the option to temporarily travel without a visa to Schengen Area countries. According to the European Commission Country Report in 2020, Kosovo has developed a sound and harmonized legal framework around migration that meets the required needs.¹⁵³

Emigration of Kosovars

The Law on Diaspora and Migration establishes a legal basis for relationships with Kosovars abroad, with a focus on preserving identity. In addition to preserving identity through cultivating national language, culture, and education among the diaspora, the law also aimed to create structures to build organization among the diaspora in destination countries and create connections between the diaspora and their host societies. It considers not just emigrants but also others considered part of the diaspora, including those born abroad to Kosovars with family origins in Kosovo. The law envisions significant efforts to establish centers for culture to build connections between Kosovo and migrants while they are abroad.¹⁵⁴ The law was complemented by the Diaspora Project Strategy 2019-2023, which although it remained in draft form, aimed to promote and advance the political and social rights of the diaspora, assist in preservation of identity, strengthen ties to Kosovo, and encourage integration in host countries.¹⁵⁵ A new 10-year diaspora strategy with a three year action plan and an amendment to the Law on Diaspora and Migration are both underway.

¹⁵⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁵¹ EWB (2022) and Regional Cooperation Council (2022b).

¹⁵² Regional Cooperation Council (n.d.).

¹⁵³ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁵⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2012).

¹⁵⁵ Republic of Kosovo (2018a); Arifagić and Mitrović (2022).

The Western Balkan Regulation is an example of how third country legislation can influence emigration from Kosovo providing legal migration pathways. The Western Balkan Regulation provides regular migration opportunities that were previously unavailable for low-skilled prospective migrants who may have otherwise turned to the asylum-seeking as a mechanism for migrating (see Box 3). Although it effectively created opportunities for the German labor market to benefit from migration, one of the primary purposes of the regulation was migration control. It was seen as a compromise after restricting the ability of Kosovars (and others from the Western Balkans) to seek asylum by designating their countries as “safe origins.”¹⁵⁶ There is evidence to suggest that the regulation was quite effective in managing migration from Kosovo. In the first two years of the regulation (following the peak year of asylum-seeking), a combined 117,000 work contracts were submitted by the six Western Balkan countries and asylum applications dropped by 90 percent.¹⁵⁷

Box 3. Germany’s search for workers

Germany utilized the Western Balkan Regulation (WBR) to manage migration and attract much-needed workers. Beginning in January 2016, the regulation allowed citizens of Kosovo to enter Germany for employment, regardless of their qualifications or skill level, as long as they had a binding job offer. The agreements were contingent on the German employer demonstrating an inability to find the labor domestically and quotas were placed on overall numbers.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the focus on addressing asylum-seeking, another impetus for the regulation was the recognition that Germany’s native labor supply is insufficient to fill labor demand and, thus, firms are in need of foreign workers.¹⁵⁹ The WBR opened an opportunity for low-skill migrants who previously had no legal pathway to migrate. Indeed, 42 percent of visa applications under the WBR were from ‘unskilled’ workers. The legislative effort did face implementation challenges that jeopardized its overall effectiveness, including a difficult application process for migrants, long wait times, and misinformation around the policy itself.¹⁶⁰ However, due to the success of the WBR in recruiting workers, and although it was originally set to expire in 2023, it was extended indefinitely, and the quota was increased from 25,000 to 50,000 annually.

Germany continued passing legislation to attract foreign workers with the German Skilled Workers Immigration Act. Passed in March 2020, the act simplified procedures to allow skilled non-EU citizens to migrate to Germany for jobs in specific sectors with skill shortages. It also included options for employers to accelerate the process and expedite the acquiring of a work permit. Furthermore, it expanded the category of ‘skilled workers’ to include those that work in related professions that only require vocational degrees. It also opened up opportunities for skilled workers with qualified vocational training to receive visas for the purpose of searching for employment, if other conditions are met. Finally, it removed barriers like the requirement for employers to prove there are no German residents qualified for the position and included opportunities for migrants to become permanent residents after four years of work.¹⁶¹ Beginning in November 2023, a new Skilled Immigration Act will begin to be entered into effect. It intends to further widen migration possibilities by increasing EU Blue card access, extending eligibility to a wider group of professionals, and creating pathways for family members.

¹⁵⁶ GAP Institute (2020).

¹⁵⁷ OECD (2022).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ GAP Institute (2020).

¹⁶⁰ OECD (2022).

¹⁶¹ GAP Institute (2020).

In terms of bilateral cooperation for emigration, previous joint efforts with Germany included attempts at labor and training agreements that prepare workers with vocational skills for work in both Kosovo and Germany. Labor and training agreements focus on providing training more cost-effectively in a typical country of origin like Kosovo, with the expectation that all or some of those who are trained will have a pathway toward migration. Setting the stage for these types of agreements, Kosovo was one of the countries selected by GIZ for the “Programme on Partnership Approaches for Development-Oriented Vocational Training and Labour Migration (PAM), which was aimed at jointly developing and piloting mobility schemes, while improving the quality of vocational education and training in specific sectors in the country of origin. One of the early efforts at designing a labor and training agreement was the Youth, Employment, and Skills (YES) Project, which focused on the construction sector with the goal of providing a three-year certification program. The construction sector was chosen because of demand for workers in both Germany and Kosovo. Through the YES project, half of participants would stay to work in Kosovo after two years of the program and the other half would migrate to Germany for an apprenticeship that could turn into longer-term employment. This effort faced some challenges, including reconciling different requirements in qualifications and standards between Kosovo and Germany that made it difficult to standardize a curriculum. A second effort similarly focused on origin training for the construction sector with a dual-track model that created pathways for both migrants and non-migrants. It was jointly funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the Ministry of Economy in Bavaria, as well as involving significant investment from private sector employers.¹⁶² This initiative also faced barriers to implementation, including difficulties recruiting and satisfying German visa requirements, as well as concern that overall efforts would encourage emigration.¹⁶³

Another example, the Heimerer College¹⁶⁴ demonstrates a model for bilateral labor and training agreements that overcomes the challenges experienced by previous efforts. The Heimerer College trains students in the health sector, through a variety of undergraduate and masters level programs¹⁶⁵, including some that are not commonly offered in South-East Europe, and then offers migration opportunities to Germany (see Box 4). The model has proven successful at providing opportunities for students. Of those who graduated between 2013-2023, 93 percent are employed, demonstrating the demand for the skillsets being produced, including the around 80 percent employed within Kosovo. Financing for Heimerer College comes from tuition fees paid by students, and German employers fund the fees for language courses for those who access the migration opportunities. The Heimerer College has found success where previous initiatives failed for several reasons. First, the choice of the health sector was important because it was feasible to standardize a curriculum that was useful in both the German and Kosovar contexts and there was a demand from employers for workers trained at that level. It is also a sector that has important potential for growth with new services and jobs. Second, the college is privately funded and was initially a product of a diaspora investment, though it now relies on tuition fees. Finally, the Heimerer College has the potential to demonstrate local impact and growth in Kosovo through the development of new jobs and industries in the healthcare field and through alignment with international

¹⁶² European Training Foundation (2021).

¹⁶³ Center for Global Development (2021).

¹⁶⁴ <https://kolegji-heimerer.eu/>

¹⁶⁵ Programs include: BSc. Nursing, BSc. Lab Technician; MA. Evaluation and Intervention Psychology; Bsc. Professional Pedagogy in Healthcare; MSc. Management of Healthcare Institutions and Services; BSc. Speech Therapy; BSc. Occupational Therapy.

standards. Other lessons learned include the need to continuously adapt, build trust and collaborate with diverse partners, as well as to stay focused on an area of expertise.¹⁶⁶

Box 4. The Heimerer College Eco-system

The Heimerer College was originally a product of a diaspora investment. It was founded in 2010 as a collaboration between a Kosovar-German diaspora investor and the Heimerer Schule¹⁶⁷ in Germany, which is a collection of schools that aim to use practical experience as a methodology for education, to train professionals in necessary sectors. The college has trained almost 2,000 students and offers a comprehensive education program specialized in health profiles that covers systems in both Kosovo and Germany, along with soft skills and mindset development.¹⁶⁸ It offers five accredited undergraduate degrees and five additional masters level degrees in the health sector, with a focus on preparing students with a curriculum that meets professional standards in both Kosovo and Germany. It also gives students the opportunity to migrate to Germany after their education with a certification that includes an on-the-job training component in Germany that takes place during the course as well as German language training. The Heimerer College shows how diaspora investment can be a unique tool that is able to leverage international standards but focus on local needs.¹⁶⁹

The future of Heimerer College envisions a broader eco-system built around the concept of health. In addition to vocational training, the school envisions expanding to include education from kindergarten up to the college, an international career program, on-site healthcare including a therapeutic polyclinic, rehabilitation center, and long-term care center, as well as research and development focused on health policy, future care technology, and interdisciplinary innovation, and finally a professional services center focused on the strategic growth of the company. All of these elements would be brought together within the structure of a Smart Village, built around health. The eco-system would include partnerships with German-speaking and European universities that would bring in new technologies and collaborative efforts toward healthcare innovations. It would also offer specialized services to the public, creating value for the community as well as learning opportunities for students. As part of the focus on delivering positive financial returns but also societal well-being, the eco-system would include an incubator and accelerator for startups that focus on healthcare and wellbeing. The vision for a broader eco-system would have the potential for local impact through the creation of high-quality opportunities from new health institutions like therapeutic or elderly care that could incentivize graduates to stay in Kosovo instead of taking the international career opportunity. It has the potential to raise the quality of jobs in Kosovo to meet EU standards and combat the idea that training simply leads to emigration. For those who did choose to emigrate, there is significant potential for continued collaboration both while they are abroad and after they return.¹⁷⁰

While non-binding, a memorandum of understanding signed with Switzerland demonstrates another option for bilateral agreements on managing migration flows. The MoU was established in 2010 to ensure regular and constant dialogue and agree to enhance cooperation in the

¹⁶⁶ Beqiri (2024).

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.heimerer.de/>

¹⁶⁸ <https://kolegji-heimerer.eu/>

¹⁶⁹ Beqiri (2024).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

management of migration, visa issues, consular matters, readmission of nationals, return assistance, prevention of irregular migration, the fight against smuggling and trafficking of individuals, cooperation in education and training, diaspora relations, integration, migration and development, and capacity building for migration administration.¹⁷¹ Though non-binding, it is part of the legislative landscape that manages migration and demonstrates the plethora of areas that have potential for collaboration.

Return of Kosovar emigrants

The readmission of citizens has been a focus of the legislative framework to manage the migration of Kosovars, and has until recently, been governed by the National Strategy for the Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Action Plan 2018-2022. The strategy established the basis for the policies and measures that needed to be implemented to ensure that repatriated migrants, who were significant in number in the 2010's, were sustainably reintegrated into Kosovar society. Reintegration was a 'key priority' of the government and the strategy was focused on improving the social and economic condition of those returned. Readmission was also important for the relationship with EU member states and the long-term process of accession to the European Union. The strategy was part of the 'Roadmap for Visa Liberalization' and received significant support in drafting from international actors like the European Commission, UNDP, GIZ, UNHCR, OSCE, IOM, and UNICEF.¹⁷² It assigned responsibility to the Ministry of Internal Affairs but recognized the need to coordinate with other ministries who have mandates for certain required services or activities. Objectives of the strategy included strengthening the reintegration system for repatriated persons through a needs-oriented approach, ensuring the sustainable socio-economic reintegration of reintegrated persons, improving inclusive cooperation in the field of reintegration, strengthening the capacity to provide an integrated approach to reintegration, and developing monitoring and evaluation systems.¹⁷³ The strategy is supported by Regulation No.22/2020 on Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, which replaced the previous Regulation No.13/2017 and further defined the mandate for serving repatriated persons, those who are Kosovars that lack the legal basis to stay in destination countries and return to Kosovo in any manner.¹⁷⁴ Upon its completion in 2022, the strategy specifically focused on readmission was integrated into the new National Strategy on Migration.

The National Strategy for the Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons developed a framework for reintegration that includes organized reception and access to an array of supports as part of sustainable reintegration. The supports include services related to civil registration, healthcare, housing, education, integration into the labor market, agricultural grants, and social services.¹⁷⁵ Regulation No.13/2017 specified that reintegration is supported through three distinct measures: organized reception and assistance immediately upon arrival, emergency benefits, and measures supporting sustainable reintegration.¹⁷⁶ This was adjusted by Regulation No.22/2020 to include a focus on access to public services, as well as the specific reintegration schemes.¹⁷⁷ The strategy outlined a case management system that recognizes the complex and heterogeneous needs that repatriated migrants have as well as an electronic system (CMS) to track their progress. The

¹⁷¹ Swiss Federal Council and Republic of Kosovo (2010a).

¹⁷² Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

¹⁷⁵ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

¹⁷⁶ Republic of Kosovo (2017b).

¹⁷⁷ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

system contains data on repatriated persons and all the services they receive throughout the process from entry into Kosovo to the completion of their case (see Box 5).¹⁷⁸

The strategy focused on decentralizing implementation of reintegration support from the central to the local level. It built on the process of decentralization that was part of the previous strategy and aimed to strengthen the measures taken at the municipal level for returned migrants. A previous regulation, No.02/2010 for the Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns (MOCR), had originally mandated that municipalities establish administrative structures to provide for the needs and ensure access to public services for the return of refugees, displaced persons, and repatriated persons.¹⁷⁹ The strategy ensures that each municipality establishes an MOCR and a Municipal Reintegration Commission (MRC), including officers assigned by relevant ministries and municipal departments who are responsible for coordination with the central level. MOCRs are the first point of contact for a repatriated person when they return to the municipality they are originally from. They are responsible for providing information, assisting, and advising the repatriated person on the opportunities available to them through reintegration schemes. They also have access to the electronic CMS system to record services provided and monitor the progress of the case until completion.¹⁸⁰

The strategy also included a specific focus on the return and readmission of designated vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups are identified by the need for specific support and treatment, due to certain characteristics. They include single mothers, children without parental care, abused children, children with special needs, unaccompanied children and separated children, elderly people without family care, people with disabilities without family care, victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking in human beings, and returnees from areas of conflict. These groups are provided with needs-based assistance to address their special circumstances.¹⁸¹

Bilateral cooperation is also fundamental for the management of return migration, which is demonstrated by the signature of readmission agreements with 24 countries. Readmission agreements formalize the process for establishing the identity of a person who is subject to a removal order and obligates that Kosovo makes plans to securely receive them. Agreements regulate the requirements and procedures for issuing acceptable travel documents and for the readmission process.¹⁸² The signing of these readmission agreements acted as a building block for the development of comprehensive readmission policies and fulfilled obligations under the processes of visa liberalization and EU accession to reintegrate returning migrants. The National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration further recognized the importance of the exchange of information with destination countries, which when absent can hamper reintegration efforts, including ‘improving communication with destinations’ as a factor that affects sustainable reintegration.¹⁸³

2.1.3. Institutional setting for emigration

Alongside the evolving legislative framework, Kosovo has also built an advanced institutional framework that continues to adapt to meet growing migration management needs. The number of institutions within Kosovo with mandates for migration has expanded to address new types of migration, including return, readmission, and labor immigration. Recognizing the dynamic

¹⁷⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

¹⁷⁹ Republic of Kosovo (2010a).

¹⁸⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

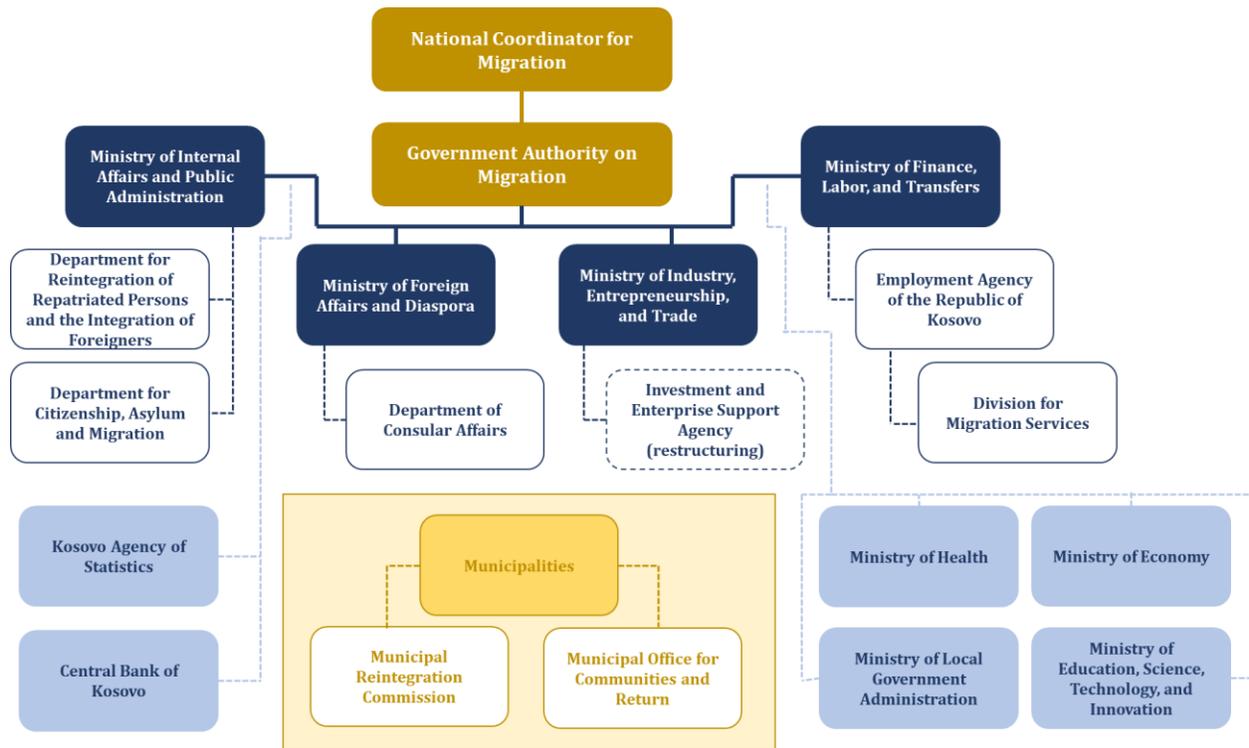
¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² European Training Foundation (2021).

¹⁸³ Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

nature of migration and the multi-dimensional needs of migrants, more institutions have been required to explicitly focus on migrants themselves. The advancing institutional framework represents an investment by Kosovo in migration to lead to greater economic and social development.

Figure 14. Organizational framework for emigration



At the top of the institutional framework is the National Coordinator for Migration, which is the body in charge of coordinating, monitoring, and reporting on the implementation of policies and all activities associated with migration in Kosovo. The National Coordinator monitors the work and functioning of the Government Authority on Migration, receives their recommendations, and addresses them to the relevant institutions throughout the government that will be responsible for their implementation or action. It also represents Kosovo in regional and international initiatives that are related to the issue of migration.¹⁸⁴

To advise the National Coordinator, in 2013 the Government Authority on Migration (GAM) was also established as an inter-institutional body that provides expertise on issues related to migration. The GAM includes members from all relevant agencies and institutions involved with migration and provides advice to the National Coordinator. It drafts national strategies on migration and produces 'Migration Profiles' with data on the current migration situation in the country. It also assists with the policy-making process and assesses how implementation of migration policy is progressing.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora (MoFAD) is responsible for policy relating to maintaining connections between Kosovo and the diaspora. MoFAD's work has focused mostly on facilitating preservation of national identity, language, and culture, as well as maintaining relationships between migrants abroad and Kosovo. MoFAD has the authority to sign bilateral agreements and manage 33 embassies and 17 consular offices abroad.¹⁸⁶ MoFAD also manages guidelines on visa issuance procedures, are responsible for the Kosovo Visa Information System, and make visa decisions. MoFAD also includes the Department of Consular Affairs, which is in charge of consular services such as certifying necessary documents, including certificates for education and training.¹⁸⁷ The Law on Diaspora and Migration also authorizes MoFAD to provide information on the investment climate for diaspora investors, draft a diaspora register, coordinate the Kosovo Cultural Centers on Diaspora and Migration, and cooperate with other institutions and civil society associations for diaspora activities.¹⁸⁸

The Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA), under the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade has been responsible for promoting investments, exports, and tourism, including when it relates to members of the diaspora. To those ends, KIESA has been running awareness campaigns with a focus in countries with large diaspora populations. KIESA is currently in the process of undergoing a restructuring, through which investment and export responsibilities will be assigned to a new Agency for Investment and Export to be established under the office of the Prime Minister.¹⁸⁹

KIESA is in the process of restructuring and authority for promoting investment will be reserved for a new agency under the Prime Minister's Office. The new Law on Sustainable Investments¹⁹⁰ will split the responsibilities currently reserved for KIESA into two agencies: the Agency of Investment and Exports (AIE/KIAA [Kosovo Investment Attraction Agency]) and the Agency for Support to Enterprises (ASEK). The new AIE will be under the Prime Minister's Office and will be responsible for promoting investments by collecting information on investment trends, running campaigns to contact investors, developing marketing material, organizing events and promotion, and building a network of mediators. Responsibilities will also include facilitating investments through screening of investors and investment projects, providing customer-oriented information on the investment environment, pre-selecting investment sites, connecting investors with local public authorities and business partners, and assisting investors with business processes. Finally, the new agency will have specific responsibilities related to the after-care of investors to ensure they receive necessary support to continue their activities.¹⁹¹

The Ministry of Internal Affairs plays a principal role in the repatriation and reintegration of returning migrants. The process is divided between two departments. The Department for Citizenship, Asylum, and Migration (DCAM) is responsible for much of the repatriation process, including accepting, reviewing, and verifying requests for readmission, informing other countries in accordance with readmission agreements. They are also responsible for issuing travel documentation and arranging for repatriated migrants to return to Kosovo through official border crossing points.

The Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners (DRRPIF) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs manages issues related to services provided

¹⁸⁶ <https://ambasadat.net/en>

¹⁸⁷ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁸⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2012).

¹⁸⁹ Republic of Kosovo (2023).

¹⁹⁰ The new law is pending a constitutional court review and is presently suspended.

¹⁹¹ Republic of Kosovo (2013).

for the reintegration of return migrants. Given the importance of readmission of repatriated migrants for the overall migration landscape in Kosovo, the MIA has held a central role for reintegration. The responsibilities pertaining to this department include drafting policies, preparing instructions, monitoring implementation, collecting and reporting information between the local and central levels, disseminating informational materials to municipalities, preparing training plans for municipalities, coordinating with local and international organizations, and maintaining the Case Management System (CMS) (see box 5). The DRRPIF has regional coordinators that work together with municipal reintegration officers to coordinate the process and they organize regular trainings and regional workshops to build capacity at the local level.¹⁹² The DRRPIF also has responsibility for signing bilateral readmission agreements and led the drafting of the reintegration strategy.

Box 5. Case Management Information System

Communication between organizational bodies for the management of services to repatriated migrants is facilitated by an electronic Case Management Information System (CMIS). The system is maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs but is accessible to other departments and ministries who are involved in the repatriation and reintegration process and would need to record updates or services offered. It functions by consolidating all information about a particular migrant's 'case,' which means recording, storing, processing, and archiving all necessary information on a repatriated migrant, including all the services they access and benefits they receive. It fully manages the case from entry to closure and ensures that all data are treated with the required confidentiality to align with relevant laws. It is able to provide a comprehensive summary of a repatriated migrant's situation, needs, and their engagement with the state up to that point. Different departments within MIA, MFAD, and the municipal institutions are all able to access the system and record work they have done with a particular case. One goal is to ensure that services are not duplicated, including with international partners. The system includes data on all repatriated persons, but not necessarily all returned migrants if they returned independently of being found to lack legal standing abroad.

The objectives of the CMIS are to:

- Provide a unified and common database.
- Ensure that each individual case is processed promptly, effectively, and efficiently.
- Ensure transparency in the reintegration budget management.
- Ensure co-ordination and facilitation of cooperation between stakeholders.
- Standardize lines and procedures of vertical and horizontal communication.
- Provide coordination and cooperation with international partners and civil society.

Source: Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

Municipalities are a fundamental part of the institutional structure for providing services to repatriated migrants, particularly through the Municipal Offices for Communities and Return (MOCR) and the Municipal Reintegration Commissions (MRC). Each municipality in Kosovo was mandated to create an MOCR and MRC that would work in coordination with municipal authorities. The role of the MOCR is to promote and protect the rights of communities and their members, including non-majority communities. This extends to creating conditions for sustainable return of migrants and promoting the reintegration of displaced and repatriated persons. The MOCR is the first point of contact for a repatriated person, and they can inform, assist, and advise the migrant on available reintegration schemes. They also refer repatriated migrants to other services that are

¹⁹² Republic of Kosovo (2017a).

available through local institutions and provide case management support. In collaboration with the MOCR, the MRC reviews and decides on requests from repatriated migrants for participation in budgeted reintegration schemes.¹⁹³

The Ministry of Local Government Administration supervises the process of decentralization that guarantees municipalities significant authority in developing their own policies related to the reintegration of migrants. Established in 2004 to advance the system of local self-government, the ministry is directly involved in the expansion of the decentralization process that allows municipalities to increase local autonomy. One objective is to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to improve sustainable municipal services for citizens. This includes updating reintegration materials and preparing training plans for municipal staff. In addition, the Ministry of Local Government Administration is mandated to supervise the quality of municipal services, which is important for migration because repatriated citizens receive services directly through their municipalities.¹⁹⁴

The management of economic migration for Kosovars going abroad is also supported by the Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers (MFLT). Responsibilities for the MFLT include assessing the financial implications of migration policy. They are also responsible for drafting employment and vocational training policy that directly impact return migrants.¹⁹⁵

Labor market needs for all citizens are the responsibility of the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), which includes reintegration services for returnees, and preparation of prospective migrants. For prospective migrants, the EARK is responsible for providing pre-departure information. They also offer job counselling generally for those who are unemployed, including those who are interested in going abroad or have been abroad before, but limited capacity means that there are only 75 counsellors for all of Kosovo. The EARK is generally in charge of vocational training and other employment-related reintegration services to help returned or repatriated migrants re-enter the labor market.

Given the multidisciplinary nature of migration, other ministries such as the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and the Ministry of Health play specific roles in the migration management organizational landscape. The Ministry of Economy is responsible for designing policies that can affect migration trends, given the prominence of economic rationales for migration. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is responsible for reintegrating return migrants of school age into the educational system. It has an additional responsibility for the mobility of Kosovar students abroad. The Ministry of Health intersects with migration through its management of healthcare, including for readmitted migrants who are eligible to access health services.¹⁹⁶

The Kosovo Agency of Statistics and the Central Bank of Kosovo also play key roles collecting data on migration. The Agency of Statistics collects and analyzes statistics related to the size and profile of emigrants, reasons for migration, and also periodic net migration flows (inflows into the country minus outflows from Kosovo to other countries) which includes the movement of Kosovar out of the country (emigrants) and back into the country (return migration). Meanwhile, the Central Bank of Kosovo collects and analyzes statistics related to remittances, which are sent by migrants

¹⁹³ Republic of Kosovo (2010a).

¹⁹⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2019a).

¹⁹⁵ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

abroad, as well as foreign direct investment and visitors from the diaspora, which also typically relate to migrants.

2.1.4. Services provided to emigrants throughout the migration cycle

Prospective migrants

Prior to their departure, emigrants can access information on migration opportunities and general job-seeking support from the Employment Agency. The Division for Migration Services within the EARK provides information and support for individuals who want to migrate through 14 counsellors located in seven employment offices. These counsellors can support prospective migrants with the preparation of CV's, provide information on in-demand occupations, and offer manuals on migration rules and regulations to key destination countries including Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, and Switzerland. The efforts of these counsellors are affected by large case burdens and a high unemployed jobseeker to counselor ratio, that was 1,106:1 in 2018.¹⁹⁷ Through the ALMP2 project, UNDP has been working with the EARK to improve HR capacity and the provision of services to jobseekers.¹⁹⁸ The EARK is also working with development partners to formalize recognition of prior learning in welding, creating a new active labor market measure, which provides certification that can be used by those seeking employment opportunities in Germany.¹⁹⁹

For those seeking services that prepare them for migration opportunities, different private sector options exist. Private schools like Heimerer College provide training in globally in-demand occupations and offer assistance with the migration process through the International Career Program. Other development partners like GIZ have designed projects around providing training to prospective migrants to better prepare them for successful insertion into the labor market abroad. Global recruitment agencies working with employers in EU countries like Germany and Poland also advertise the ability to find employees in Kosovo and help both employers and employees navigate the migration process.

Current emigrants and diaspora

For migrants who are abroad, supportive consular services are provided through 33 embassies and 17 consular offices around the world. These services include receiving applications for personal documents, providing verification of other documents such as driver's licenses, and issuing return travel documents. They also offer applications for citizenship of family members, as well as the ability to register births, marriages, and deaths for migrants while abroad. Embassies and consular offices also provide assistance for Kosovars who are arrested or detained abroad, or for citizens who pass away. General consular support is provided to all citizens of Kosovo living in countries that have a diplomatic presence.

Both the government and development partners have made efforts to engage with and provide services to the diaspora for development purposes, particularly through knowledge sharing and investment. An important first step for leveraging the diaspora for development is maintaining connections with migrants while they are abroad. Kosovo has taken the initiative to organize several events to bring together diplomats and experts from around the world to discuss strategy for engaging the diaspora. For example, the government has organized the Ulpiana Forum,

¹⁹⁷ UNDP (2018).

¹⁹⁸ UNDP (2022).

¹⁹⁹ European Training Foundation (2021).

a multi-stakeholder event to foster diaspora engagement which took place in November 2023 and will have another round at the end of June 2024. The Diaspora Winter Academy is another example, which will take place in April 2024, that focuses on bringing together diplomats from around the world to share knowledge on best practices with regards to working with the diaspora. The government also has hosted initiatives for youth such as the Diaspora Summer Academy, which brings back young people to learn and connect with their national, linguistic, cultural, and educational identity. Development partners are also effective at building networks and implementing programs to pilot innovative ways to support migrants in ways that are also beneficial for Kosovo.

Several online platforms have been developed or are under development that aim to help members of the diaspora maintain their connections to Kosovo and preserve their Kosovar identity. The NGO Germin has developed an online platform (KosovoDiaspora.org) that aims to crowdsource digital engagement to connect Kosovars to the world and the world with Kosovars. It promotes and celebrates the achievements of Kosovars abroad and back home and helps migrants maintain cultural connections and preserve their identity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora has similarly planned an initiative to create an online portal (e-diaspora.org) as part of the new diaspora strategy. This digital portal will allow diaspora members to access services and information such as news on investment opportunities. It will operate complementarily to e-Kosova, a digital platform that offers a wide range of services to all Kosovar citizens. The MFAD has previously engaged in efforts to register members of the diaspora with around 400,000 migrants registered voluntarily in 2012. The MFAD also provides support to connect diaspora members with events such as camps and summer programs that ensure their continued connection to Kosovo.

The government has experimented with different ways to offer investment opportunities to members of the diaspora both through specific mechanisms and through general information and awareness. KIESA, the institution tasked with facilitating investment in Kosovo, including from diaspora investors,²⁰⁰ aims to do so through awareness campaigns and facilitating business partnerships. There is an increased focus on their role due to the recent visa liberalization, which could increase opportunities for business interactions across borders. Another way the government has offered investment opportunities is through the recently implemented three- and five-year diaspora bonds. Issued in 2021, they were initially offered as a way to support the recovery from Covid-19.²⁰¹ The bond raised EUR 10 million out of the targeted EUR 20 million. At the local level, some municipalities have taken their own steps to encourage diaspora investment for local development. For example, the municipality of Suhareka established a Directorate for Diaspora to improve coordination efforts with migrants abroad, then created an industrial park to offer favorable opportunities for outside investment.²⁰²

Other agencies and organizations also offer services to businesses with ties to Kosovo and members of the diaspora to promote their investment in the country. Germin, along with other development partners, promotes investment opportunities by training local businesses to be ready to work with outside investors, identifying local businesses with growth potential, organizing diaspora business conferences, and connecting local and diaspora businesses together. Caritas Switzerland is another development partner with activities that focus on promoting diaspora investment in Kosovar businesses, primarily through the MARDI project (see Box 6). As part of their Investment Promotion and Access to Finance initiative, USAID works to increase access to

²⁰⁰ According to data from KIESA, 26 percent of foreign direct investment comes from Germany, 24 percent from Switzerland, 12.5 percent from the United States, 10 percent from Albania, and 6 percent from Austria – large percentages from countries with particularly significant diaspora populations. Germin (2023b).

²⁰¹ OECD (2022).

²⁰² Gashi, Shabani, and Rizvanolli (2013).

investment for private sector growth. Activities include establishing connections between the private sector in Kosovo and diaspora members, setting up investment funds, working with financial institutions to introduce new products, and supporting businesses on investment readiness. Chambers of commerce are often particularly interested in promoting diaspora investment by working directly with businesses who are looking to do business in Kosovo. The German-Kosovar Chamber of Commerce works primarily with businesses in Germany that have ties to the Kosovar diaspora, providing reports and information about Kosovo, facilitating access to government institutions, and connecting businesses directly with municipalities to ensure investment opportunities. With regards to the investment potential of remittances, a recent initiative by the World Bank, Project Greenback, worked directly with migrants and their families, as well as remittance service providers and public authorities to improve the impact of remittances through financial education, awareness-raising, stakeholder capacity-building, and market engagement and coordination. Project Greenback 2.0 piloted further intervention in the city of Prizren to expand efforts to leverage remittances for greater and more productive impact.²⁰³

The Diaspora Engagement for Economic Development (DEED) project was a previous successful effort from multilateral partners. The project was a collaboration between IOM and UNDP that focused on building the capacity of Kosovo authorities to fulfill the National Strategy for Diaspora 2013-2018 and work directly with the diaspora, including to facilitate investments. These efforts also included specific assistance for remittance-receiving households engaging in entrepreneurship, leading to the employment of at least 85 citizens through matching grants for 47 private enterprises based on a diaspora investment of 150,000 Euros. The project also included a feasibility study on potential innovative financial products that would further benefit remittance recipient households. The project implemented 13 investment conferences and networking events to facilitate business to business connections with the diaspora, as well as two international trade fairs promoting domestic products abroad. Finally, the project established 25 diaspora business networks in Europe, the United States, Canada, Türkiye, and Australia under the umbrella of the Global Union of Diaspora Business Networks. One strength of the project was its effort to work with remittance senders, recipients, the private sector, and government authorities altogether to improve the effectiveness of diaspora investment.²⁰⁴

Box 6. MARDI: A model for investment

Through the MARDI project, Caritas Switzerland combines networking and matching funds to incentivize investment from the diaspora, offering a successful example of how the diaspora can be engaged through active programming. The entire project contains three key outcome areas. The first two are focused on increasing municipal and non-governmental capacity to address challenges in the field of migration and specifically improve individual support for sustainable reintegration of migrants. The third outcome area is focused on investment and usage of the diaspora know-how and financial capital for economic development, specifically at the municipal level. Under this area, one element of the project is connecting business investors from the diaspora with businesses in Kosovo that are in search of investment. The project also promotes local businesses to the diaspora to create new opportunities for connection. Other components include establishing relationships between municipalities in Kosovo and municipalities in the EU and connecting public institutions in Kosovo with the diaspora. Once the groundwork for an investment opportunity is laid, the MARDI project offers matching grants for investments from project funds to provide further incentive for innovative and sustainable businesses. So far, six investment project agreements have been signed in different sectors including textiles, wood

²⁰³ World Bank (2022).

²⁰⁴ Arifagić and Mitrović (2022).

processing, food processing, and ITC. A second call for applications was published to identify new eligible investment projects and Caritas received 16 applications and is expecting to add to the number of signed projects. This model shows one way that a development partner can effectively incentivize and channel diaspora investment for productive purposes in Kosovo.

Another component of the MARDI project, implemented in cooperation with the NGO Germin, focuses on facilitating opportunities for members of the diaspora to provide knowledge exchange through short-term engagements in public institutions in Kosovo.

Under the title of ‘Engaging Diaspora Professionals,’ this component recruits diaspora professionals to work directly in municipalities on initiatives to increase capacity and contribute to local development, based on their areas of expertise. In the first six months of 2023, 11 diaspora professionals were actively engaged through the MARDI project, with nine more to be engaged by the end of 2023.²⁰⁵ The project covers cost of living but does not include compensation.²⁰⁶ An example of the work these engaged professionals do can be seen in the municipality of Podujeva, where a member of the diaspora has been embedded in the municipal government to support in their legal office and provide inputs for improvements in how to engage the diaspora and in the overall investment climate. Germin’s role in the project also includes the development of a platform²⁰⁷ to conduct outreach to diaspora members regarding these engagement opportunities. In addition to providing diaspora experts, additional capacity building is provided for the municipalities through trainings on designing investment proposals.²⁰⁸

Source: Caritas Switzerland (2023a; 2023b); Qorri and Canhasi (2023)

The government has also implemented initiatives that aim to leverage the skills and knowledge of migrants while they are abroad for development purposes back home. The Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship Program, operated by MFAD, brings young professionals from the diaspora to support the policy-making process in Kosovo for periods of 6-10 months. The program also includes a plan to develop a diaspora talent pool that can guide further outreach efforts. In addition to leveraging skills and knowledge of migrants while they are abroad, an identified priority, included in the National Strategy, is to encourage and promote the return of intellectual potential to Kosovo. The MFAD is has also plans to design a scientific program to link scientists in the diaspora with the University of Pristina, with the objective to establish an R&D lab for migration and diaspora.

Return migration and reintegration services

Kosovo has developed a comprehensive system that provides services for the repatriation and reintegration of Kosovar migrants under readmission agreements back into the country.

These services have been developed primarily in response to the significant number of migrants who left to seek asylum abroad and who were forced to return involuntarily or facing difficult conditions. Migrants from Kosovo who lack legal standing to remain in destination countries exist in three categories. Some may return to Kosovo independently of being informed by the destination country of their need to leave. Others receive negative decisions from the destination country and are required to leave; of which some choose to return voluntarily (sometimes with assistance from

²⁰⁵ The Program for Engagement of Diaspora Professionals was launched in 2019 with the support of GIZ and has engaged over 30 diaspora experts. Results for 2023 reflect the current efforts as part of the MARDI project with municipalities in Kosovo.

²⁰⁶ OECD (2022).

²⁰⁷ <https://germin.org/engagement-of-diaspora-professionals/>

²⁰⁸ Caritas Switzerland (2023a).

international organizations), and others are returned by force.²⁰⁹ These migrants, who are found to lack the legal basis for staying abroad, are repatriated to Kosovo and are eligible for repatriation and reintegration services. The infrastructure to support these migrants has been developed into a good practice system that efficiently repatriates migrants in collaboration with destination countries and connects them with services based on their needs, tracking their progress throughout the process. Although the process is well-designed, there remains an opportunity to ensure that the system comprehensively supports all migrants who return.

The process for the readmission of repatriated migrants to Kosovo begins when migrants are still abroad through collaboration between Kosovo and destination countries. Repatriation begins when destination countries determine that a Kosovar citizen does not meet their requirements for entry or residence within the territory and submits a readmission request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs Department for Citizenship, Asylum, and Migration (DCAM) in Kosovo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora can also act as a bridge for communication between Kosovars abroad themselves and Kosovar institutions. Once the request for readmission is received by DCAM, they are in charge of establishing or presuming the citizenship of the identified person and informing the destination country of their confirmation. After the request is confirmed, DCAM issues the required travel documentation and organizes travel such that readmission takes place through an official border crossing point. They also notify both the border police and the Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners (DRRPIF) who will take over at the border crossing. During this process, DCAM registers data on readmitted persons in their own database, following data protection protocols.²¹⁰ This basic framework for providing repatriation services can be superseded by bilateral readmission agreements, which have been signed by the Republic of Kosovo with 24 countries²¹¹ (22 readmission agreements).²¹² The agreements often adjust the requirements for timing, with regards to various steps of the process. Importantly, the repatriation process also applies to foreigners who meet the requirements for legal entry and stay in Kosovo (valid visa or residence permit) or who illegally entered and stayed in Kosovo prior to migrating to the destination country.²¹³ The repatriation and reintegration process continues when repatriated persons arrive at the border crossing point and enter into the authority of the DRRPIF.

During the peak years of outward asylum-seeking, several assisted return programs from destination countries and international organizations also provided support in the return process, mostly from Germany. Although some have been in existence since 1999, these programs were mostly offered for asylum-seekers arriving in Germany in 2014/2015 who were then supported to return through programs called “Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany” or “Government-Assisted Repatriation Programme” that covered travel expenses and up until 2015, also provided some start-up financial assistance.²¹⁴ Migrants were able to apply for voluntary return through counselling centers and received counselling to support their decision-making process.²¹⁵

The process of repatriation transitions into reintegration when migrants arrive at border crossing points in Kosovo. While the communication with destination countries and approval

²⁰⁹ Government Authority on Migration (2018a).

²¹⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2010b).

²¹¹ Albania, France, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Slovenia, Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg), Czech Republic, Montenegro, Sweden, Finland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Malta, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Croatia, Italy, Turkey and Northern Macedonia.

²¹² Republic of Kosovo (2021).

²¹³ Republic of Kosovo (2010b).

²¹⁴ Möllers et al. (2017).

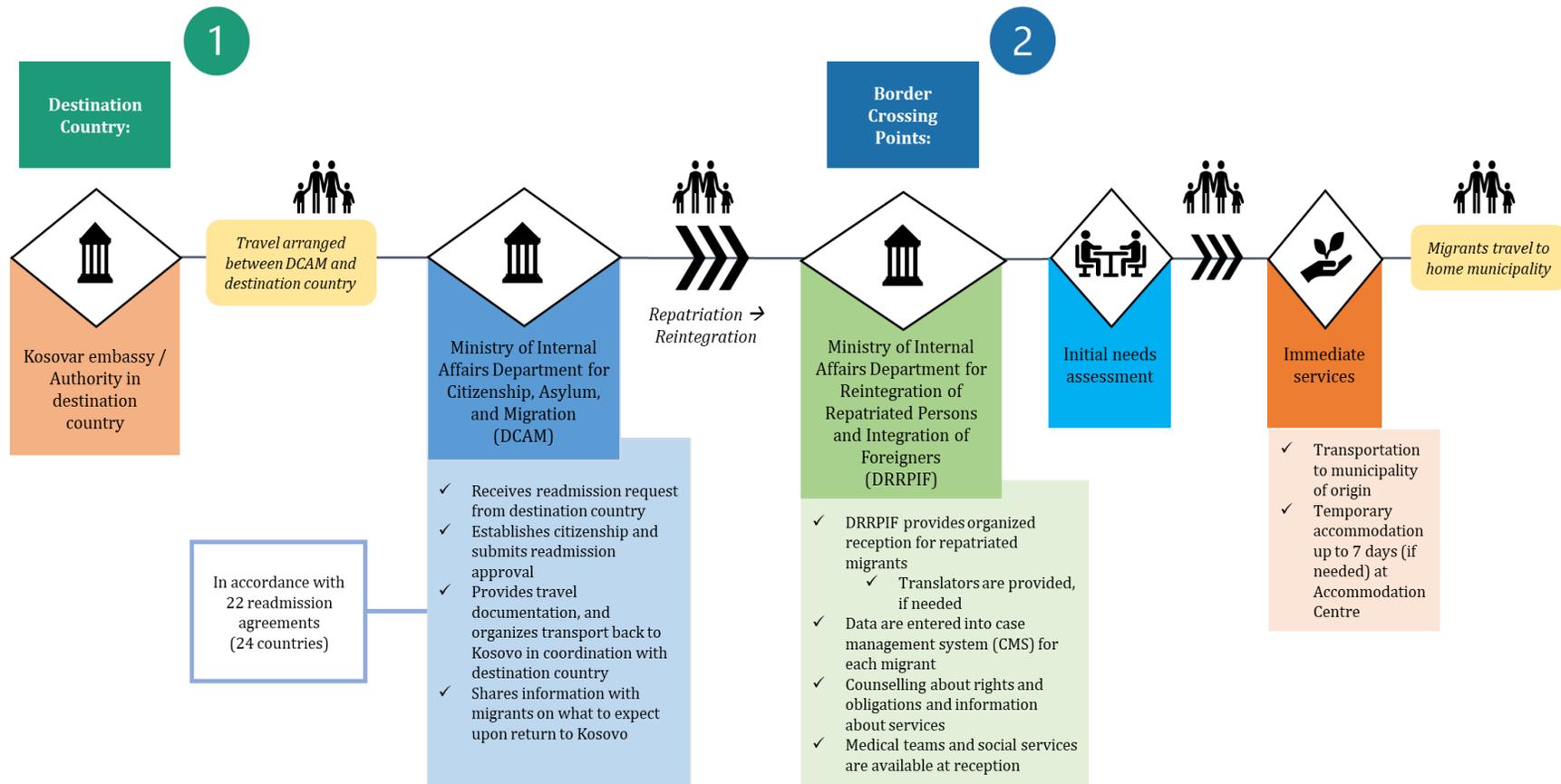
²¹⁵ <https://www.returningfromgermany.de/en/programmes/>

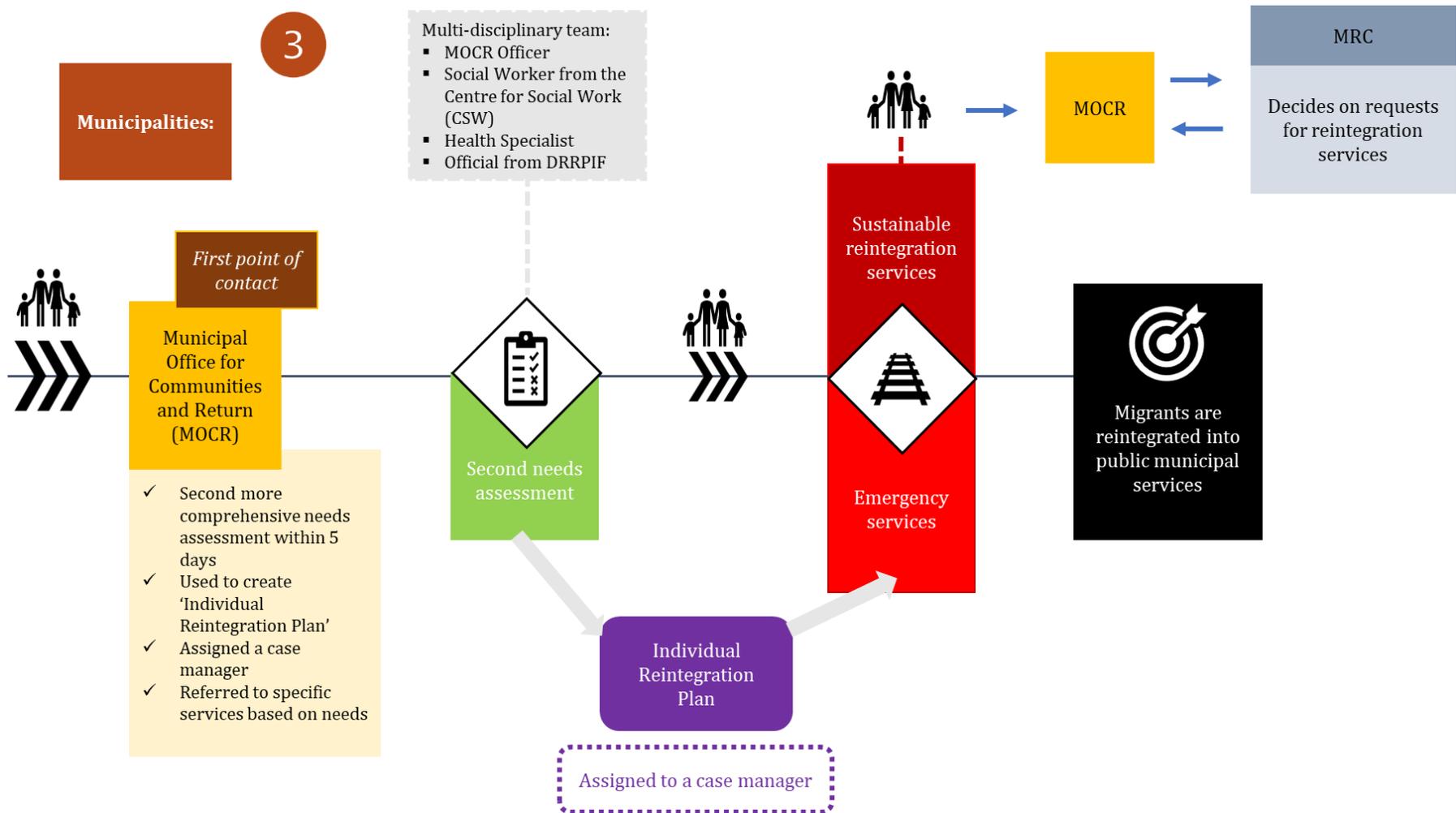
process is conducted by the DCAM, the department responsible for reception at border crossing points is DRRPIF. Upon their arrival, repatriated migrants are received and first entered into the Case Management System (CMS) by the DRRPIF as an active case. These data can also be cross-referenced against those who are recorded in the DCAM database. In the occasion that a repatriated migrant misses the reception at the border crossing point, they can be contacted directly in their home municipalities through the registry from the communication between destination countries and the DCAM, and with support from the national police. The case management system for the reintegration of repatriated migrants is comprised of services immediately provided upon arrival (see paragraph below), as well as specific emergency and sustainable reintegration measures when they return to their home municipalities. Eligibility for repatriation services is reserved for migrants who were repatriated²¹⁶, lived for at least one year uninterrupted outside Kosovo, submit their requests for emergency services within three months of their date of repatriation (or six months for sustainable reintegration services), have not been previously repatriated, and are not benefitting from similar schemes provided by NGOs or other authorities. Repatriated migrants also lose the right to assistance and support in the case of irregular re-emigration. Although specific reintegration measures are provided along the way, reintegration is expected to be supported by access to public services in the municipalities.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ According to Republic of Kosovo (2020a), a repatriated person is a “Kosovar who, due to the lack of legal basis for staying in a foreign country, is repatriated to Kosovo regardless of their return manner.”

²¹⁷ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

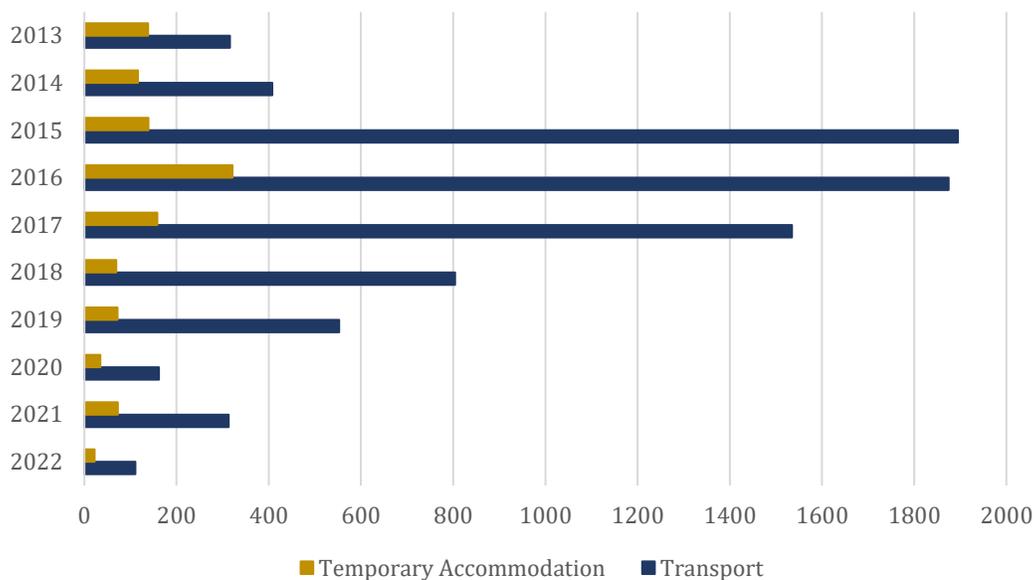
Figure 15. Repatriated migrants are returned and reintegrated through a case management system





Repatriated migrants are first provided with immediate services upon arrival to ensure that their return is safe and orderly. They receive organized reception services at border crossing points with the presence of medical teams and social services, including at the Reception Center for Repatriated Persons under the authority of DRRPIF.²¹⁸ Upon reception, information on readmitted migrants is recorded and they are profiled to determine any necessary referral services through an initial needs assessment conducted at the admissions office or border crossing. Readmitted migrants are then provided with information and counselling about their rights and obligations, the process of readmission, and other available services, including through leaflets that are distributed. Transport services are also available for migrants to continue from the border crossing point to their destinations within Kosovo. Temporary accommodation services are available for up to seven days for those who do not have other housing options. Transport is one of the most commonly received immediate assistance supports with nearly 2,000 people per year being transported to their final destinations during the highest asylum-seeking years. Assistance received in the form of temporary accommodation was also highest from 2015-2017 and still remains available, though it is accessed less frequently.²¹⁹

Figure 16. Transport and Temporary Accommodation Supports are Frequently Required by Readmitted Migrants



Source: Government Authority on Migration.

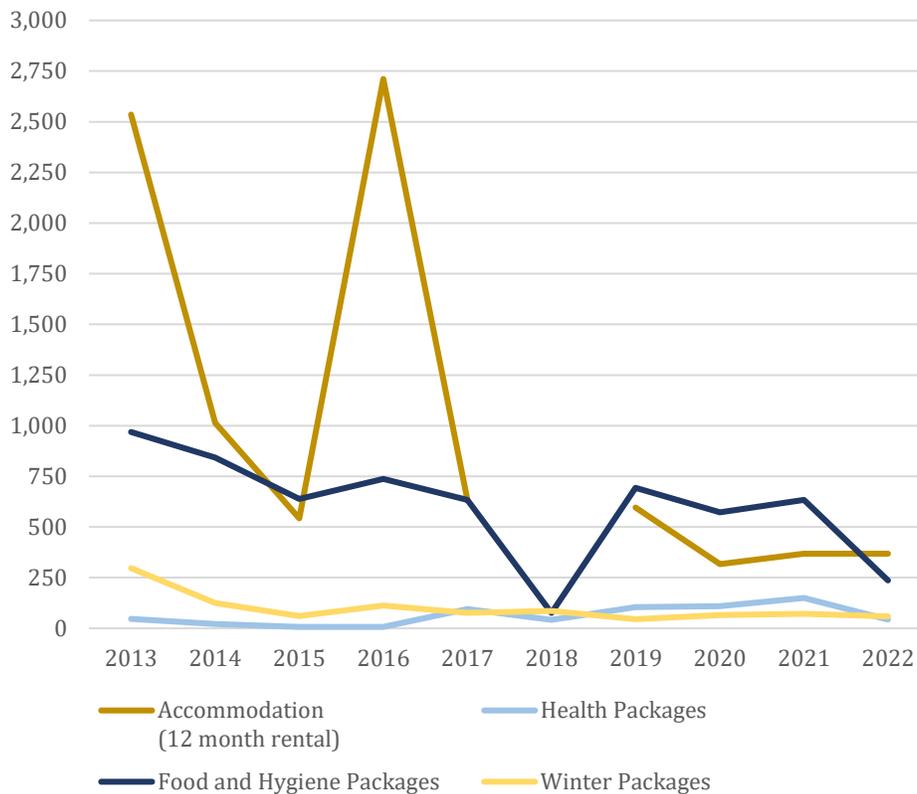
Upon their return to their home municipalities, repatriated migrants are provided with emergency services to cover their immediate needs. When repatriated migrants arrive in their home municipalities from the border crossing points, their first point of contact is the Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR), which will be the main body responsible for their reintegration at the local level. This ensures local ownership and spreads out responsibility for service delivery around the country. At the MOCR, migrants receive a second needs assessment, conducted by a multi-disciplinary team, to determine their immediate needs. This assessment is used

²¹⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

²¹⁹ Government Authority on Migration (2021; 2019; 2018b; 2018a).

to create an 'Individual Reintegration Plan' and the migrant is assigned to a case manager. Services available under the category of emergency assistance include food packages, hygiene materials, and other services not provided by the municipality. Rental accommodation services are also provided up to 12 months. Vulnerable migrants can receive winter assistance to cover the cost of fuel for the winter and migrants with health needs can receive compensation for the cost of certain treatments and medicines for up to 12 months.²²⁰ Accommodation services were especially necessary for readmitted migrants during the peak asylum-seeking years, and food and hygiene support has been consistently provided over the years.

Figure 17. Emergency Services



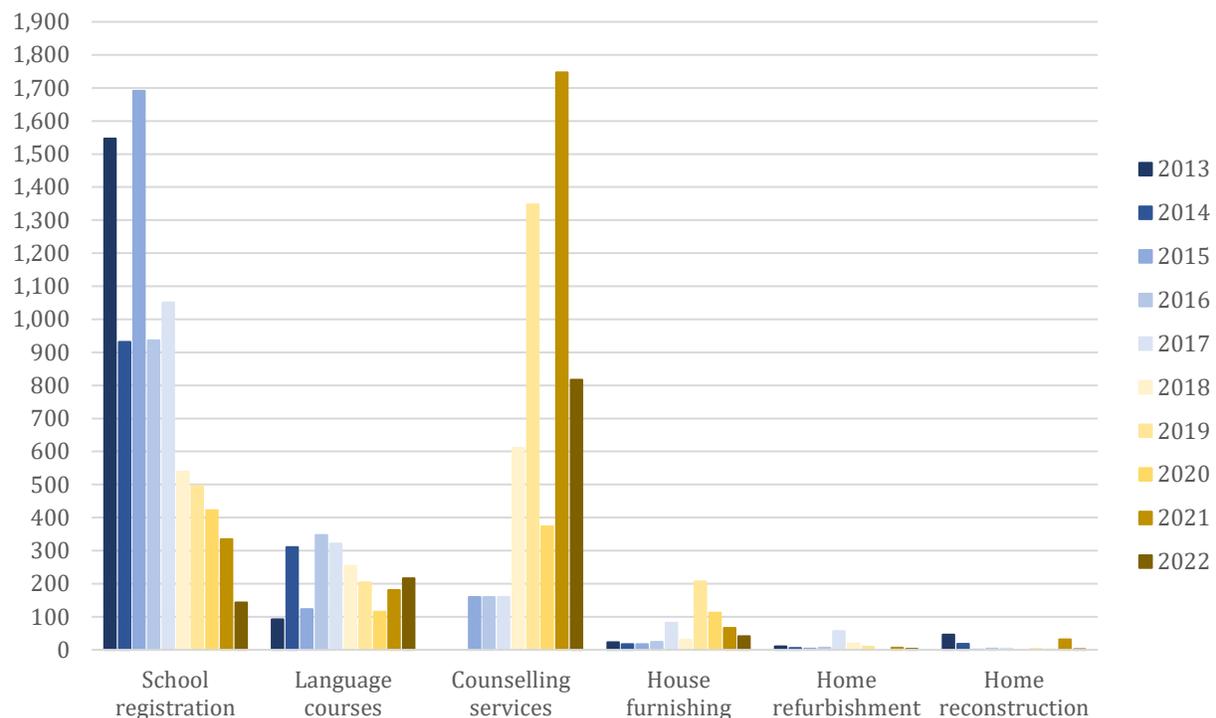
Source: Government Authority on Migration.

Reintegration services to address longer-term needs are also available for repatriated migrants through the municipal structures. While it is expected that all returning migrants are reintegrated through access to general municipal services, repatriated migrants in particular are eligible for some specific reintegration measures. These services are accessed through requests that are submitted to the MOCRs who receive them, verify the situation, record the request in the CMS, forward to the Municipal Reintegration Commission (MRC) for evaluation, and then relay the decision of the MRC back to the repatriated migrant. These specific reintegration measures include additional services focused on active reintegration into the labor market and support through agricultural grants in rural areas. For those who have lived outside Kosovo for a continuous period of five years and can prove that their residency in Kosovo prior to emigration has been destroyed,

²²⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

there are services that provide reconstruction or renovation of housing. Repatriated migrants who lack household furniture can also receive furniture packages. Psychosocial support services are provided to those who have had traumatic experiences, mental health disorders, or difficulties in adaptation. Children are also eligible for special reintegration measures including services to ensure registration and inclusion in the educational system, as well as supplementary education and language courses as determined by individual assessments at school. Special reintegration measures are available for certain vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors, persons with disabilities, victims of human trafficking, and more. Services for students including school registration and language courses are commonly accessed and some services like counselling are rising to prominence, but large-scale supports for housing are rarer (see Figure 26).²²¹

Figure 18. Reintegration assistance (non-employment)



Source: Government Authority on Migration.

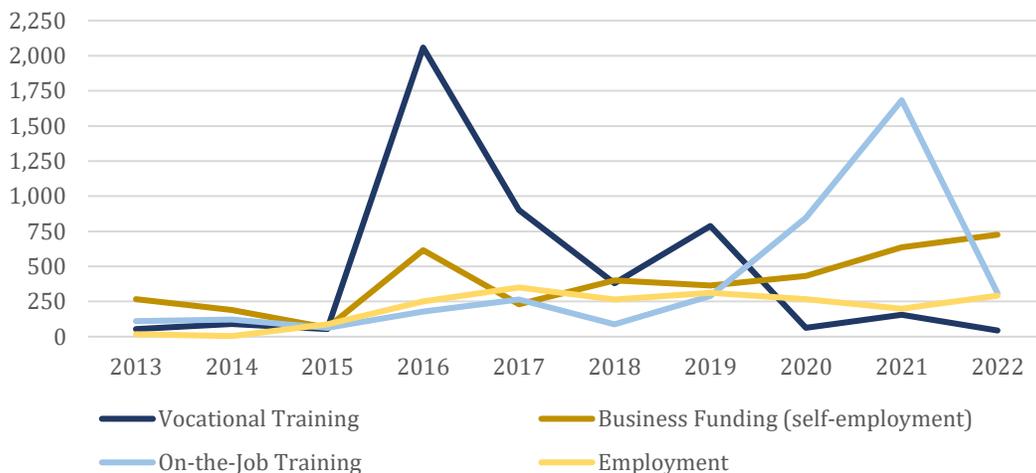
Besides the specific reintegration measures, repatriated migrants have access to public services as any other citizens of Kosovo. These services are provided through municipal institutions and exist independently of specific reintegration measures. Public services that are accessible by repatriated migrants include civil registration and access to necessary documentation to ensure the civil status of migrants and family members who were born outside Kosovo – allowing them to receive other municipal services. Public services also include access to housing and community-based housing services, entitlement to social protection and assistance in completing necessary documentation, free legal services throughout the reintegration process, and health services through public health institutions with exemptions from payment in the first year after

²²¹ Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

repatriation. These services are available to repatriated migrants, pursuant to applicable legislation, as they are to all other nationals of the Republic of Kosovo.²²²

Labor market services for reintegration are provided by the Employment Agency and include services available as jobseekers and additional specific measures accessible for repatriated migrants. To access labor market services, migrants must be registered as job-seekers, who are able to receive municipal employment services, which include counselling for career orientation and profiling and participation in vocational and employment training. The additional sustainable reintegration measures for repatriated migrants available through the MOCRs include on-the-job training, subsidized employment, and self-employment promotion, which are also provided through the Employment Agency. In addition to being provided by the Employment Agency, services frequently provided by international organizations who sign agreements to support the reintegration process. As can be seen in the data (see Figure 27), vocational training was initially prioritized in response to outward asylum-seeking before being phased out as a specific reintegration measure. In recent years, support through on-the-job training and business funding increased. Following the surge in outward asylum-seeking in 2015, there was an increase in need and a response through increased capacity, especially through greater cooperation with international partners. The scale of employment support services could still be increased to meet the needs of all returning migrants, not just those who were repatriated.

Figure 19. Sustainable employment reintegration assistance



Source: Government Authority on Migration.

Development partners, including NGOs, provide a wide array of services, particularly for more difficult cases and with additional support for disadvantaged ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities face greater challenges in the reintegration process, which are reflected in lower scores in reported life satisfaction and greater mental stress or higher health problems.²²³ Development partners typically work more intensely with these more challenging cases. Some NGOs specialize in offering education services for minority community children of returned migrants, including through afterschool classes in community centers. UNDP has worked for years on the reintegration of repatriated persons with a particular focus on youth, minorities, and women. They provide training

²²² Republic of Kosovo (2020a).

²²³ Möllers et al. (2017).

and employment opportunities including wage subsidies, self-employment, internships, on-the-job training, and vocational training, working through the municipal structures to build their capacity to provide labor market integration support. According to a recent evaluation, they have provided services to 6,191 total beneficiaries, including 1,424 receiving on-the-job training, 1,517 receiving wage subsidy support, 1,241 receiving self-employment training and support, 623 placed in internships, 606 receiving training at vocational centers, and 780 receiving entrepreneurship support. Of the total project beneficiaries, 40 percent were women and 15 percent were ethnic minorities.²²⁴ GIZ is another development partner that has been active in economic reintegration for returning migrants. Through the DIMAK center they offer individual advice, employment and education opportunities, mediation into support programs and training for occupational reintegration, help with business start-ups and mentoring, support during the job search and job application training, and psychosocial consultation.²²⁵ German NGOs and development organizations also offered reintegration counselling and psychosocial support specifically to vulnerable migrants during the peak years of asylum-seeking as part of the return packages.

²²⁴ UNDP (2022).

²²⁵ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and GIZ (2020).

Chapter III. A Policy Agenda

Section 3.1. Building on existing system strengths and opportunities to prioritize reform areas

The system for managing migration in Kosovo is built on strong foundations and has evolved to meet changing needs and contexts. Kosovo's management of migration is characterized by two key features: a strong system for efficiently and humanely returning those who migrate irregularly, and a powerful diaspora that offers channels for development going forward. New policy actions can build off these strengths.

Kosovo has strengthened collaborations with European destination countries to build a robust system for the repatriation and reintegration of migrants. This system was developed as part of a coordinated international response to irregular migration, but also relies on strong internal coordination between different domestic agencies. The Kosovar system offers an example of how case management can be provided in the context of migration with comprehensive services that are based on multiple assessments of needs. The system's interoperable database is accessible by all agencies providing services both at the central and at the municipal levels. The coordination between agencies in the area of repatriation and reintegration can serve as a model for coordination in other aspects of the migration cycle.

The Kosovar diaspora remains financially connected to Kosovo, representing a potential source of development for the country. This connection is demonstrated through remittances that amount to around 18 percent of GDP, a high share even when compared to other countries in the region. If just 10 percent of remittances were channeled through direct investment, FDI would increase by 20 percent.²²⁶ Recognizing this potential, initiatives have been put in place by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to tap into the diaspora's development potential.

Unleashing the development impact of migration means thinking more broadly about a vision of Kosovar migration that emphasizes a global workforce including Kosovar migrants around the world. While some migrants may return to Kosovo, others will not, and some will fall somewhere in between – they build ties abroad and simultaneously remain connected at home. Their success in finding opportunities abroad is not a loss for the country but rather creates new opportunities. Investing in services for migrants wherever they are in the migration journey can unlock other types of impact. It is important for a mobile country like Kosovo to think about its workforce not just as those who currently reside within its borders, but also including the skills, talent, and knowledge of its broader workforce around the world. For example, migrants who return to Kosovo are the ones who can fill labor shortages and skills gaps, bring back new ideas and innovative practices, or start their own businesses providing employment for others. Members of the global workforce who have successful experiences abroad can send remittances, transfer knowledge remotely, build business networks, engage in a variety of investments, and more. A highly connected global workforce also gives Kosovo the opportunity to more fully participate in the global economy. Migrants can create linkages between countries and conceptualizing a mobile dispersed workforce opens up more opportunities to build on collaborations for protecting vulnerable migrants and extends it to topics

²²⁶ Both remittances and FDI could be channeled toward more productive purposes. According to the Central Bank of Kosovo, two-thirds of FDI in 2022 and 2023 has been in real estate activities (60% in 2023 and 72% in 2022) and this largely represents demand from diaspora members. There is also significant spending on the export of travel services, which is driven by visits from diaspora members.

such as collaboration on skills training for the global workforce. With the correct policies, the global workforce is ready to support Kosovo's continued development.

To achieve this vision, existing efforts can be complemented by additional actions to further strengthen the governance of migration in Kosovo and the services available to migrants. This includes the strategy, legislation, and agreements that guide migration management, as well as the services provided to migrants before they leave, while they are abroad, and when they return. A key element underlying any reforms would also be strengthening the data system to allow for informed and evidence-based policy-making, which can ensure the greatest development impact of the global workforce.

Stronger governance

The governance system for managing migration in Kosovo can be strengthened by fully integrating migration into key development strategies. Legislation in Kosovo is aligned with international standards and a particularly strong system has been instituted for the repatriation and reintegration of asylum-seekers. The existing migration infrastructure has been formulated as a response to the needs of the most vulnerable migrants and could be strengthened by creating structures to proactively leverage the broader benefits of migration. While there is significant strategic focus on managing migration in an orderly manner and protecting those who return, as evidenced by the majority of total budget going toward the reintegration of return migrants,²²⁷ there is less focus on leveraging migration for development. Legislative and institutional efforts can be incorporated that are driven by the idea that migration is a fundamental part of the country's economy and can lead to gains for the country. This includes improving internal coordination of efforts toward the diaspora, for which there is no policy coordination mechanism nor a formal diaspora representative body that institutions regularly consult. It also includes legislative measures to actively incentivize return migration, which currently emerges as a gap in the national strategic framework. In addition, the governance of migration in Kosovo can be strengthened by reducing reliance on donor funding, which accounts for nearly 30 percent of the total implementation budget for the National Strategy on Migration.²²⁸

Migration can be integrated into the development strategy when it is aligned to labor market needs. This requires an understanding of what skills the labor force currently has and what the economy needs – including where there are mismatches between the skills being produced and those in demand. The current state of the labor market in Kosovo presents both challenges and opportunities that connect to migration. The challenges include a low level of activity among the working-age population, a mismatch in skills between what employers need and what the labor force offers, and constraints on the creation of new high-quality jobs. In this context, migration can offer policy opportunities to invest in skill development for the global market.

Box 7. Current challenges and opportunities in the Kosovo labor market.

Inactivity: Although the unemployment rate has decreased significantly from around 30 percent just five years ago, to 10.7 percent in the second quarter of 2023, the employment rate remains low. More jobs are being created but the labor force has not grown as would be expected in the case of falling unemployment.²²⁹ According to Labor Force Survey data, the inactivity rate in 2022 was 61.4 percent, which is nearly 2.5 times the rate in the European Union. Labor force

²²⁷ OECD (2022).

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Betcherman (2024).

participation rates are highly correlated with education attainment and gender, with men and more educated individuals being significantly more engaged in the labor market.

Skills gaps and mismatches: There is evidence that young workers joining the labor force in Kosovo are not entering with the right skills that are relevant for employers. Firms consistently report being constrained by difficulties in hiring workers, particularly the ‘lack of qualified personnel,’ which was the most commonly reported barrier faced according to a Chamber of Commerce survey from 2023. In general, there is a mismatch between the skills being produced by the education and training system, and those that are in demand by employers. In 2019, 77 percent of VET profiles offered by vocational schools were not based on occupational standards and aligned to labor market needs.²³⁰ The skills deficit is being exacerbated by the emigration of some of the most educated young workers. Moving forward, the green transition is also expected to continue changing the task content of a significant portion of jobs, increasing the needs for further training investments to avoid widening skill gaps in the workforce.²³¹

Low quality job creation: While some indicators show upgrading in the structure of employment in Kosovo, with the distribution of jobs becoming slightly more high-skilled, the sectors with the highest rate of job growth are lower-wage sectors. Poor job quality remains a factor and is commonly cited as driver of emigration. Employers who cannot find workers with the skillsets they require are also constrained in their ability to grow and offer more, new high-quality jobs. These labor market challenges create policy opportunities for Kosovo. Policies to address these challenges can focus on bringing people into labor activity by providing opportunities to build in-demand skills to fill new higher-quality jobs.

Source: Betcherman (2024).

Kosovo can also build on existing collaboration and bilateral agreements to strengthen formal migration corridors for development impact. The readmission agreements Kosovo signed with European destination countries contributed to building a robust system for the repatriation and reintegration of migrants. Bilateral agreements can also be used to proactively protect against the risks and enhance the benefits of migration for migrants. They can manage formal channels to ensure that those who leave have the right skillsets to successfully contribute abroad. Global Skills Partnerships can also be explored to mitigate potential losses of human capital. These are agreements where the origin country trains people in skills needed in both sending and receiving countries (e.g., nurses), with the receiving country partly financing the training. At the end of it, some trainees migrate (“away” track) while others stay in their country of origin (“home” track), supporting the availability of human resources in key sectors. **More Tailored Services**

To unlock the potential of the global workforce, Kosovo has significant room to expand service provision to migrants throughout the entirety of the migration journey. Migrants have large potential economic gains from their migration experience, particularly those that migrate for job opportunities. However, migrants also face particular vulnerabilities across the migration journey and require support and services. These services can exist at each stage of the migration lifecycle, prior to a migrant’s departure, while they are abroad, and when they return. In Kosovo, there are currently limited services offered to migrants in the first stage of the cycle, prior to their departure, to ensure they are well-prepared or have their credentials recognized to address the issue of overqualification abroad. Once they are abroad, efforts to engage the Kosovar diaspora are not

²³⁰ ALLED2 and EIPP (2019).

²³¹ World Bank (2024).

offered through a coordinated approach nor integrated into the migration experience from before migrants leave the country. For migrants who return to Kosovo outside of the repatriation process, there are limited services tailored to their needs or to the opportunities and assets they bring with them, nor efforts to incentivize them to return in the first place. Much of the extensive services that have been integrated into the existing system are importantly designed to address negative outcomes by providing transportation, food, shelter, and other support to repatriated migrants who need it. On the other hand, there are limited services available for migrants who return not in adverse conditions, that aim to leverage successful economic migration for development gains. A migrant who chooses and plans to return, bringing skills and resources to start a business in Kosovo could still benefit from services that incentivize and enhance the impact of their investment. Fully embracing the potential of the global workforce means recognizing that providing services strategically across the migration lifecycle can lead to improved migrant experiences and better development outcomes.

Data for migration policy-making

A more effective management of Kosovo's global workforce also requires strengthening data collection systems across the migration cycle. More detailed data collection on migrants and returnees is needed to better track their migration journey, needs and assets, to then design adequate policies. The renewed effort to create a diaspora registry and better understand the circumstances of Kosovar emigrants is a promising step to more effectively engage members of the global workforce who are abroad. For migrants who return, those who are returned under readmission agreements are extensively tracked through the case management system, but there are significant gaps in data on those who return outside of bilateral agreements. Specific tools can be used to strengthen the overall understanding of the impacts of migration on Kosovar households. Periodic household surveys need to incorporate questions on current migrants and return migration in order to better capture the whole extent of the phenomenon and the trends in economic and social outcomes of this group. Furthermore, dedicated ad-hoc surveys administered to migrant households that include questions on the migrants themselves can provide more information on the migration history, and its impacts on different aspects such as human capital accumulation, entrepreneurship, and savings and support better evidence-based policies.

Prioritizing a policy approach

While there are multiple possibilities for implementing policies to improve the management of migration for development in Kosovo, a promising option is to engage in bilateral training and migration partnerships with destination countries. There is an array of potential interventions to unlock the development benefits of migration that could address issues related to stronger governance, more tailored services for migrants, and deficits in data for migration policymaking. This report focuses on one particular policy that can be a part of a reform agenda for Kosovo in the area of migration: bilateral training and migration agreements. Given Kosovo's strong existing linkages with some destination countries and the potential for aligning migration with labor market needs, these agreements, and in particular the Global Skills Partnerships model, offer a unique policy opportunity. While there are multiple potential gaps to address, a Global Skills Partnership could ameliorate the identified challenges of linking migration with development goals, improving the availability of skills in the country, reducing migrants' skills waste in destination countries, and expand the availability of services for migrants prior to their departure. In addition, Kosovo has prior experience with Global Skills Partnership models, including entrepreneurial endeavors like the Heimerer College that have demonstrated the potential domestic benefits from such training models and could be scaled up through public policy. Focusing on the potential for bilateral training and migration agreements does not preclude the possibility of other policies that are focused on other areas of the reform agenda for migration in Kosovo, nor would it address all the

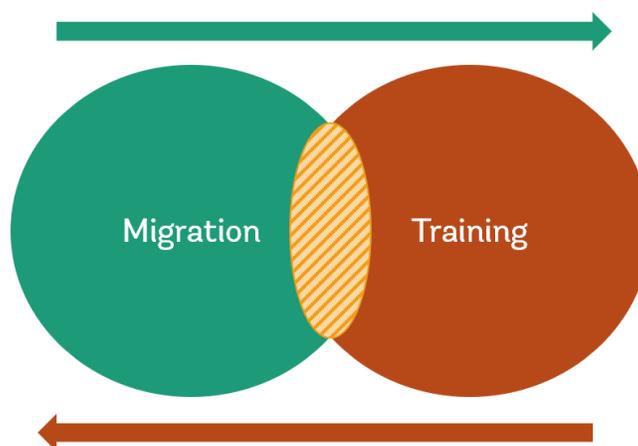
challenges associated with migration in the country. The impacts of migration are part of a larger economic context, and broader policies can be considered to improve the quantity and quality of the available labor supply in the country, including tackling low employment rates, supporting female labor force participation, and facilitating labor immigration.

The next sub-section proposes a practical approach to build bilateral training and migration partnerships. Sub-section 3.2 presents the concept of bilateral training and migration agreements as a mechanism for comprehensively managing migration for Kosovo’s development benefit. It then introduces different models for agreements and explores why a Global Skills Partnership might be best for Kosovo given underlying labor market realities. Sub-sections 3.3 and 3.4 then delve into the specifics of how a Global Skills Partnership can be designed, other stakeholders that can support it, and options for financing. The final sub-section 3.5 ends with a discussion of the feasibility of a potential arrangement with an interested destination country.

Section 3.2. A mechanism for managing migration better and more comprehensively

Bilateral training and migration agreements are one mechanism that can ensure migration is holistically integrated into a development strategy. These are agreements between origin and destination countries on the training and migration of workers in specific sectors and with specific skills, in a way that training ensures mutual gain for both countries. These agreements are marked by two fundamental characteristics: migration through a legal labor pathway, existing or new, and mutual agreement on training and vocational focus. A bilateral training and migration agreement is therefore a planned migration arrangement between countries that manages emigration in a way that in addition to benefitting destination countries who gain workers, also ensures that origin countries benefit strategically according to their development goals. The exact structure of who will be trained and who migrates depends on the different country contexts, but relies on the underlying idea that migration, when managed well, can be beneficial for migrants, destination countries, and origin countries as well.

Figure 20. Bilateral training and migration agreements combine skills training with legal labor migration



Through bilateral training and migration agreements, origin countries can manage migration in ways that its positive impacts can be augmented and connected to domestic development.

These agreements are based on specific sectors that countries can choose based on where they see development opportunities. One potential opportunity is to strengthen domestic skills development system through international collaboration. Another opportunity is to organize migration around a sector with growth potential that could benefit from international linkages. Migration through formal agreements allows origin countries to integrate services ranging from preparation before departure, to diaspora programs while they are abroad, to support for their return and reintegration. A comprehensive system of services integrated into a migration pathway can ensure their continued connection to their country of origin and incorporate ways for them to give back for the country's development. Formal agreements also improve the protection of migrants and can provide them with increased awareness of their own rights and responsibilities.

Bilateral training and migration agreements can increase the likelihood that migration can result in benefits for origin countries, destination countries, and migrants themselves.

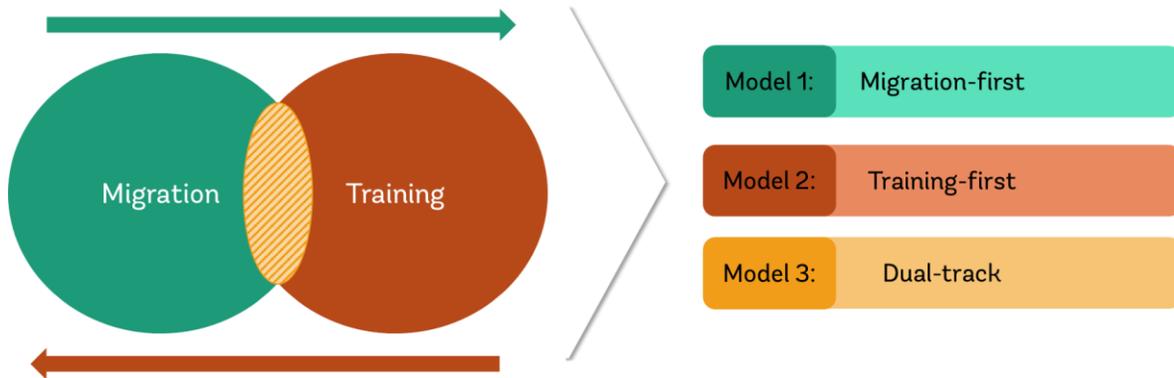
Global labor markets are facing long-term structural changes due to forces such as ageing populations, climate change, and technological disruption, which are intensifying the global competition for workers and talent. Destination countries are already facing growing labor shortages. For example, Europe is currently facing a significant skills gap and estimates suggest that by 2050, an additional 44 million workers will be required.²³² Demographic imbalances between youthful countries and those with ageing populations mean that there are ample opportunities for migration to be mutually beneficial. Migration has the potential to address these demographic challenges, as well as labor deficits and skill gaps, while benefitting both origin and destination countries and alleviating poverty through increased remittances and human capital investment. Properly managing migration for this purpose requires partnership and coordination to avoid potential negative consequences such as 'brain drain' or human trafficking. This collaboration is between countries and also with the international community, who is interested in ensuring that migration is managed fairly and well on a global scale. The World Bank's World Development Report 2023 highlights that migration, when managed well, can provide benefits for all those involved, and bilateral training and migration agreements offer a mechanism to provide that assurance for both destination and origin countries.

Section 3.3 Adapting bilateral training and migration agreements based on context and needs

There are three basic models for bilateral training and migration agreements. The three models are based on different combinations of the two fundamental elements: migration and training. The first model is a migration-first model where selected migrants who meet certain basic criteria travel through a legal labor pathway to a destination country where they receive pre-agreed training in a specific sector and are employed abroad. The second model is a training-first model where migrants receive agreed-upon training in a vocational sector in the origin country before migrating through a legal pathway to the destination country. The third model is a dual-track arrangement where selected candidates in the origin country who meet basic criteria receive collaboratively designed training in the origin country. Some of these participants will be a part of a 'domestic track' and will be employed in the origin country upon completion. Other participants will be in the 'abroad track' and will migrate to a destination country to receive complementary training for employment in the destination country.

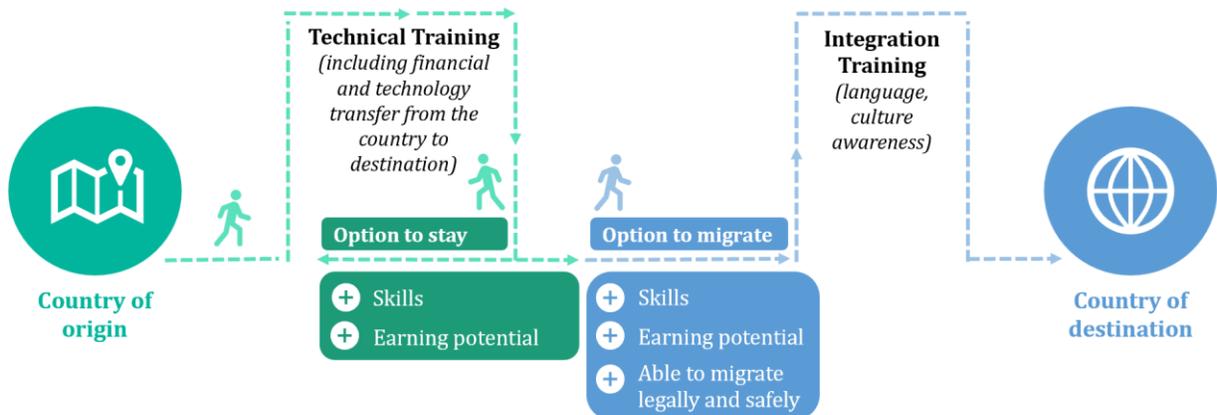
²³² Kenny and Yang (2021).

Figure 21. Migration and training are combined in different ways to form three models for agreements



The third model is called a Global Skills Partnership and aims to address a skills shortage in both countries while strengthening a formal migration channel. Typically, the destination country agrees to provide resources for the training of workers in the country of origin to participate in the two tracks – ensuring that both countries experience net gains of skilled workers and human capital (see Figure 30). This model also ensures investment into the education and training system in the country of origin to compensate them for producing qualified workers for markets abroad.²³³

Figure 22. The third model follows the Global Skills Partnership concept



Source: Expanding Legal Migration Pathways from Nigeria to Europe, World Bank.

²³³ Adhikari et al. (2021).

Box 8. International examples of the three bilateral training and migration agreement models

Migration-first: An example of the first model of bilateral training and migration agreements is the GIZ Triple Win program in Vietnam, through which young Vietnamese workers migrate to Germany and complete a nursing course for employment with German firms.²³⁴

Training-first: The GIZ Triple Win program in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and other countries) follows a second-model approach where trained nurses from countries that can demonstrate a high standard of training are selected for migration to Germany and placement with German employers.²³⁵

Dual-track: The PALIM partnership between Belgium and Morocco was designed to train young Moroccan workers in ICT skills that were in-demand by employers in both Morocco and Belgium. The design was a dual-track model where some workers remained to work in Morocco and others in the away track traveled²³⁶ to Belgium.²³⁷

A Global Skills Partnership model can be promising for Kosovo given the underlying need to further develop skills for the workforce. Of the three models, it offers the best chance to address the labor market challenges of inactivity, skills mismatch, and low job quality. Its essential focus is investment in human capital in the origin country, enhancing the skills development system to provide training that produces the skillsets domestic employers need in order to fill vacancies, grow, and create even more higher-quality jobs. Creating these high-quality opportunities can increase labor market participation while the model simultaneously addresses some of the risk of 'brain drain' from net emigration of skilled workers by increasing human capital. The Global Skills Partnership model offers an opportunity to invest in the improvement of training quality to reach international standards and create pathways for inactive workers to work both at home and abroad, both providing benefits for Kosovo's development. Those who remain to work in Kosovo are a new source of skilled workers for domestic firms who are struggling to hire qualified workers. Those who migrate to work abroad will join a financially connected diaspora that has shown a continued engagement through high levels of remittances. Organized migration in a specific sector can also lead to development benefits through circular migration, technology transfer, and FDI to boost the development of that sector in Kosovo.

A Global Skills Partnership also aligns with the current draft Employment Strategy 2023-2027 for Kosovo. Workforce skills are at the heart of the first strategic objective of the draft employment strategy, which is to 'develop skills and competences of the workforce and reduce skills mismatches.' A Global Skills Partnership model would directly address the stated outcomes of this objective such as reducing vertical skills mismatch and increasing adult participation in training programs. A Global Skills Partnership could also address the second strategic objective of 'increasing the participation in the labor market of women, young people, and other groups at risk of exclusion' by targeting those groups for training.²³⁸ The strategy recognizes that Kosovo is currently experiencing a demographic advantage with its young population that will persist for the next few decades, and also that

²³⁴ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/80962.html>

²³⁵ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/41533.html>

²³⁶ The migration of workers was delayed until recently due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

²³⁷ Adhikari et al. (2021).

²³⁸ Republic of Kosovo (2024).

education has a premium in the labor market and a positive impact on labor force participation. These two elements are central for an origin country in a Global Skills Partnership.

Box X. Kosovo as a suitable country for pursuing Global Skills Partnerships

Kosovo is well-positioned to be an attractive partner for destination countries interested in Global Skills Partnerships. Kosovo's advantage as a partner comes from both structural factors and past experience:

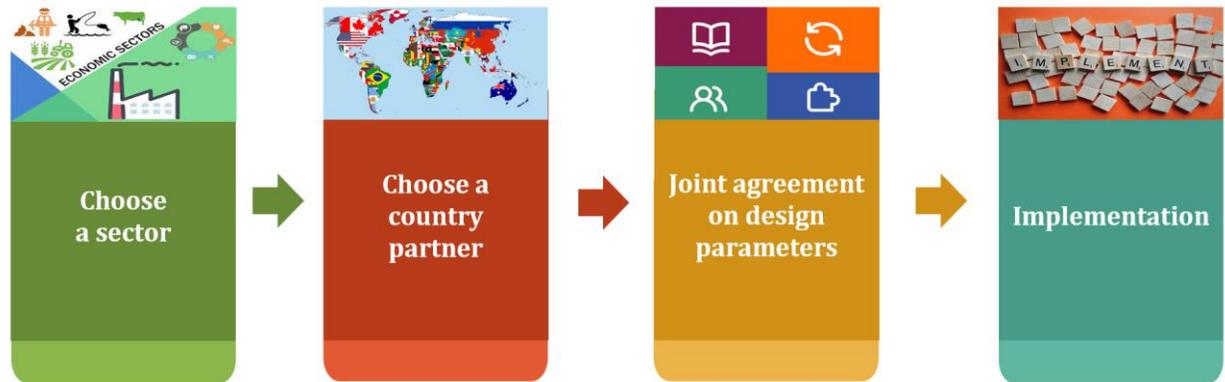
- **Emigration experience:** Kosovo has significant experience with emigration, which has historically been a prominent phenomenon. With a current diaspora of around 800,000 Kosovars living abroad, there are significant populations well-integrated in countries around Europe that still remain connected to Kosovo and can build cultural ties between the countries. Relative to its population, Kosovo has one of the largest diasporas in the world. The history of emigration is a particular advantage for partnerships with countries that are home to large Kosovar diasporas such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria.
- **Young population:** Kosovo is one of the youngest countries in Europe with a median age of 32 years old, compared to 43 in Austria and Switzerland, 45 in Germany, or 48 in Italy.²³⁹ The large youth population expresses strong levels of willingness to migrate, including in the preliminary results from the new World Bank Life in Transition Survey (LITS IV) that found over 15 percent of individuals who intend to move abroad in the next year.
- **Compatible training system:** Kosovo's training system, which is of high importance for a skills partnership, is compatible with training structures of potential European partners. Kosovo has been engaged with development partners to strengthen the quality and relevance of the education and training system through cooperative initiatives such as the ALLED II program, co-funded by the European Union and Austrian Development Cooperation.
- **Language connections:** Kosovo has a particular advantage in potential partnerships with German -speaking countries where language might not be as much of a barrier, given strong diaspora and cultural connections.

Section 3.4 Designing a Global Skills Partnership

The process for designing a Global Skills Partnership involves a series of steps that will determine how the mechanism will function. The final format of a Global Skills Partnership is flexible and will depend on a series of key decisions, including the sector of focus, the countries involved, and other variable parameters that need to be decided as part of the engagement. The implementation of the agreement will also be guided by preparation required in both countries based on the final design decisions. The entire development process of a partnership should be done through collaboration to ensure alignment with available resources and development goals in both countries.

²³⁹ United Nations World Population Prospects.

Figure 23. The key steps for designing a Global Skills Partnership



A key element of designing a Global Skills Partnership is the choice of sectoral focus, which should be based in labor market realities and strategic goals. The most important factor in choice of sector is ensuring that there is a skills need in the domestic labor market to benefit from the creation of more human capital and demand from employers who are willing to recruit trained workers. There also needs to be a similar or complementary skill need in the country of destination. Identifying sectors with skills needs involves conducting assessments of the labor market and clearly understanding trends, and strategic goals. Other important factors for the choice of a sector are political will and public interest, and that the sector's growth is strategically aligned with development goals. A key element of Global Skills Partnerships is that the training system will benefit from the inflow of investment to align with global standards. A viable sector also has specialized training requirements that ensure the necessity of the value added through the training curriculum. Having a specialized skillset also creates an opportunity to incorporate recognition of prior learning into the agreement. A final consideration for the choice of sector is the potential for migration of workers in that field to generate remittances, both monetary and through the transfer of technology and know-how that will come with increased linkage between the sectors in the two countries. For a country of origin, the decision on sector is strategic - although some workers trained in the selected skillset will migrate, the improved training system, increased human capital, and linkage to international knowledge and technology mean that the sector could be a source of domestic growth going forward.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Adhikari et al. (2021).

Figure 24. The choice of sector depends on labor market needs and development goals



Source: Adhikari et al. (2021).

The choice of a country partner is also strategic and based on shared needs and existing linkages. For Global Skills Partnerships to be effective, there first must be alignment on labor market demand in the selected sector for both countries. Negotiating an effective collaboration can also be aided by existing foreign policy ties, especially when there are already visa schemes for workers to access and strong communication between government ministries in both countries. In Kosovo, this could be countries where there are already bilateral labor agreements in place related to the repatriation of migrants. An ideal country partner also has strong labor laws, which will help ensure that migrants are protected throughout training and employment and will have access to mechanisms to receive and resolve grievances. In order for Global Skills Partnerships to be successful, migrants must have successful experiences and strong labor laws can help make that the case. Another factor for selecting a country partner is to prioritize countries with existing migration pressures, to ensure a minimum size of the programs. Finally, choosing a country partner with existing cultural linkages can reduce barriers to integration that migrants may have upon arrival, including language proficiency and understanding of social norms. Countries with large Kosovar diaspora populations can similarly offer easier opportunities for integration due to community organizations and cultural ties.

Figure 25. Viable country partners for a Global Skills Partnership have similar labor needs and existing ties



Source: Adhikari et al. (2021).

After determining the focus sector and country with which to partner, the participating countries jointly agree on additional variable design parameters. In addition to the two fundamental factors, migration and training, that determine the model of agreement, there are other elements with various options that must be mutually decided to finalize the structure of the partnership. First, the countries need to agree on the demographic profile of workers who will be trained and migrate and if they will have previous training. The countries also need to determine how the migration will be managed, including the length of time abroad, whether migrants will be tied to a single employer or freely participating in the labor market, and any other employment condition guarantees. The agreement will also be defined by the exact details of the training curriculum, which needs to be agreed in collaboration between all stakeholders. This includes which elements will be conducted at origin and which at destination, the mixture of theoretical and practical training, and the integration of language and cultural awareness training. The agreement on training also needs to include the specific procedures for documenting skill gains or recognizing achievement of competence. Finally, an agreement between the participating countries needs to be reached on how the training and migration partnership will be financed. With Global Skills Partnerships, there is typically a recognition that contributions in some form should come from both countries who are benefitting from the arrangement.

The implementation of a Global Skills Partnership involves preparation and groundwork in both the country of origin and destination. Connections need to be established with employers in both countries to understand their needs and ensure their support with training design and job offers for candidates. Relevant authorities also need to identify training providers in both countries who are capable of providing the training at the necessary standard. The two countries should work together to confirm the process required for participants to navigate the selected legal labor pathway and determine what level of support will be provided. Channels should be established to recruit candidates who meet the necessary basic criteria and processes should be put in place to select participants. This includes an agreement between both countries on the profile of participants, including existing skill level and other basic criteria to ensure they will have success abroad.

Materials for technical and intercultural training will need to be prepared in collaboration and with input from all parties.

Implementation requires strong connections with employers in both countries to ensure successful employment outcomes. These connections are developed as part of the design of the agreement. Participants are informed up front about any agreements with employers and receive information about the jobs they will be eligible for. As part of the training process, employers can be involved early on with interviewing and vetting of candidates, and the matching of workers with employers can be integrated into the curriculum. Signed contracts add another level of commitment from all parties and are especially helpful if there is an element of work-based learning, as is often the case with vocational education.²⁴¹ Employers should also be consulted prior to the initiation of the agreement on the process of skills recognition as they have the clearest information on what requirements they have for competency.

Global Skills Partnerships include logistical planning for the departure and arrival of candidates who will migrate. For those who are registered in an ‘away track,’ the additional procedures required for migration can be integrated into the training process. Support can be provided for participants to undergo health checks, pass through visa procedures, and receive work permits in the country of destination. The departure and arrival of candidates in the ‘away track’ should also be coordinated between the relevant authorities in both countries so that migrants can be met after arrival and supported with immediate integration needs.

In the destination country, implementation includes continued support for training and integration after migrants arrive. Those who are selected for the ‘away track’ will need support dealing with authorities in an unfamiliar environment and navigating new bureaucratic procedures. This can be integrated into the training curriculum through additional technical and post-arrival training, which will also include continued support with language acquisition. In addition to facilitating integration into the destination country, Global Skills Partnerships can include continued services for migrants to maintain connections with their country of origin. Via these models, the government knows exactly who is migrating and can efficiently offer a variety of services that focus on facilitating positive impacts such as remittances or knowledge transfer.

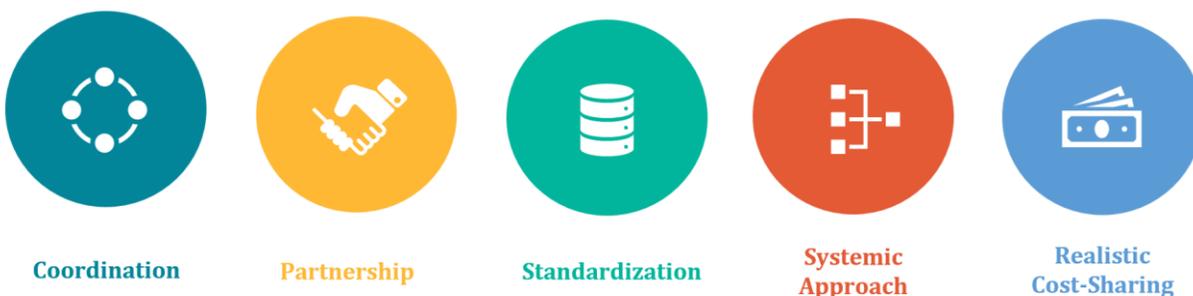
The implementation of a Global Skills Partnership also includes ongoing evaluation of the process and its results. The training and migration of skilled professionals is a complicated process with potential for negative outcomes if proper protocols are not followed. In order to protect migrants and ensure they are not facing exploitative conditions in either country, they benefit from having redress mechanisms accessible to lodge complaints and have them adjudicated. Data should also be collected so that both countries can understand migrants’ experiences, as well as labor market effects in both countries. Strong evidence is important to understand if the arrangement has been successful and can be continued or expanded, including to new sectors or with other countries.

Five underlying principles are the basis for successful Global Skills Partnerships. The first is coordination. Coordination is required between government agencies within each country, between countries, and with the private sector to ensure that participants can smoothly move between systems. Additional stakeholders including industry associations, technical training providers, and potentially international organizations also require additional coordination. The second principle is the spirit of partnership, a recognition that both countries and participants can benefit when the agreement is managed well and equitably. The third principle is standardization, which ensures that training in a dual-track system can prepare workers for employment in both countries. Standardization also brings investment in improving the training system in the country of origin and

²⁴¹ Adhikari et al. (2021).

fosters trust for the destination country that workers who migrate will be well prepared. A systemic approach is another principle of bilateral training and migration agreements - they should be focused on long-term development goals of addressing labor market needs in both countries, increasing human capital, and improving education and training systems. The final principle is realistic cost-sharing, which recognizes that the costs associated with training workers and building human capital (that in the absence of agreements are often assumed entirely by the origin country) should be shared between stakeholders who can all provide financing in accordance with the benefits they receive.²⁴²

Figure 26. Underlying principles for bilateral training and migration agreements



Source: Gruber (2024).

Box 9. Lessons learned from international experience

The number of international examples of agreements in the structure of the third model is growing. Arrangements such as the Pilot Project Addressing Labor Shortages through Innovative Labor Migration Models (PALIM)²⁴³ in Belgium and Morocco, the Towards a Holistic Approach to Labor Migration Governance and Labor Mobility in North Africa (THAMM)²⁴⁴ project between Belgium, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC)²⁴⁵ arrangement with Pacific island countries, and the Digital Explorers²⁴⁶ program between Nigeria and Lithuania have provided valuable lessons learned that can benefit new agreements going forward.

Skill recognition and suitability: Previous efforts have shown the importance of ensuring that qualifications gained by workers through the training portion are recognized and accredited in both countries. Agreements rely on the principle that training will smoothly transition to employment in both countries. International experience has shown the importance of involving employers and public employment agencies in the design of training to ensure that skills are being suitably built.²⁴⁷

Financial sustainability: An agreement has a higher chance of financial sustainability if it involves a wide range of stakeholders, including all those who benefit. Being dependent on one source of finance can leave an agreement open to the risk of political changes and time limitations.

²⁴² Gruber (2024).

²⁴³ Belgian Development Agency (2019).

²⁴⁴ ILO (2019).

²⁴⁵ <https://www.aptc.edu.au/>

²⁴⁶ <https://digitalexplorers.eu/>

²⁴⁷ <https://gsp.cgdev.org/>

Welfare protection: Migration is at the center of these agreements and the rights of migrants can be protected throughout the process. International experience has shown the importance of including provisions to monitor and enforce workers' rights and providing sufficient consular services to offer protection and additional resources.

Social integration: A lesson learned from international experience is that agreements should include measures to support those in the 'away track' in the process of integration into their new country, including access to local services and connections to diaspora communities abroad.

3.4.1 Support from other stakeholders and the international community

Collaboration with the private sector is important for the effectiveness of a Global Skills Partnership. An agreement is most effective when it is driven by employer demand and working with the private sector in both countries is important to ensure that skills development is aligned with labor market needs. This includes coordinating directly with the private sector in labor market assessments and the design of the training curriculum. The private sector is also attuned to dynamic changes in labor market needs that would require adjustments to the training curriculum. Collaborating with employers in both countries requires additional coordination and planning but strong employer ties can also ensure that the job matching process goes smoothly.²⁴⁸ The involvement of the private sector is also important for the principle of partnership and models that are entirely supported by public funds are essentially providing training for private sector employees free of charge.²⁴⁹ Around the world, the private sector has demonstrated a willingness to fund training, including in other countries, when it offers an opportunity to save on costs.²⁵⁰

In Kosovo, the Heimerer College has already shown the role the private sector can play for investment in origin country training leading to positive development impacts. The Heimerer College was a private sector response to a market demand for health workers and new health profiles in both Germany and Kosovo. Recognizing the need, it invested in a dual-track training infrastructure to prepare workers and align training in Kosovo with international standards. It was also the product of diaspora investment, which provided the initial start-up financing. Diaspora members and groups are important stakeholders in the private sector who have skills and interests that can be valuable for establishing a labor mobility pathway, such as through investment as was the case with the Heimerer College, knowledge transfer, or supporting in integration efforts.²⁵¹ In Kosovo, the investment in training by the Heimerer College has led to positive development impacts through the creation of new jobs and industries, as well as offering new health services to citizens that were not previously available.

International organizations can also provide support to facilitate bilateral training and migration agreements. They have the convening power to bring a diverse array of stakeholders to the table, which can help to facilitate coordination. International organizations also have experience

²⁴⁸ Adhikari et al. (2021).

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

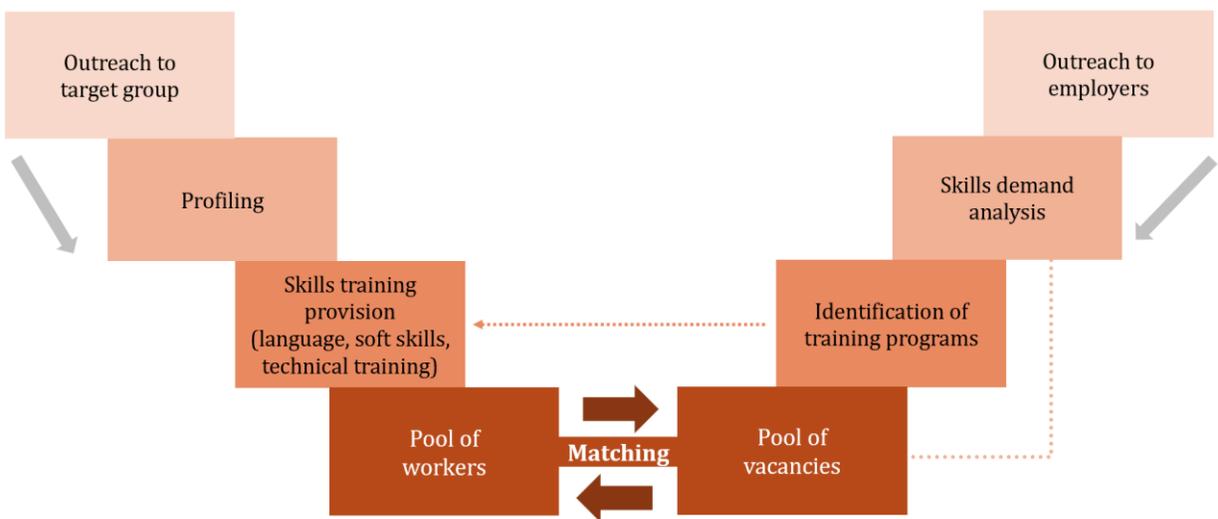
²⁵⁰ Porsche, the automobile manufacturer, has training and recruitment centers in Manila, Mexico, and China. Another example is the Ghana Industrial Skills Development Center, which was founded in partnership with a Dutch textile firm. The Tata group, an engineering firm in India, created a training facility in Singapore to train local workers, which led to spillover effects and eventually contributed to the development of a strong polytechnic and TVET training system in Singapore.

Ansu and Tan (2008).

²⁵¹ IOM (2023).

in providing support for holistic systems building, including for vocational education and training and for monitoring and evaluation. Within the functioning of a Global Skills Partnership, international organizations can provide analytical and technical assistance in both origin and destination countries to ensure the suitable matching of participants with jobs. This can include outreach to participants and to employers, profiling of applicants and analysis of skills demand, and identification and support to training programs. International organizations also have experience designing mechanisms that facilitate the match between a pool of workers and a pool of jobs. Finally, international organizations have an interest in providing financing for policy interventions that can lead to positive development outcomes.

Figure 27. International organizations can support with matching mechanisms for workers and jobs



Box 10. International partners are particularly well-placed to mitigate specific risks that have hampered previous attempts at training and migration agreements.

Low quality of skills training: While previous efforts have struggled to provide training at the standard required for employment in destination countries, international partners have ongoing collaborations around the world on building capacity and improving the quality of education and training systems.

Lack of stakeholder coordination: International partners have convening power and can support in the development of structures for regular communication among stakeholders.

Security concerns: One concern for programs involving the movement of people across borders is security from the perspectives of health, safety, and obedience to visa regulation. International organizations can help develop strong screening protocols and integrate security checks into the application and training process.

Lack of employer interest: One challenge for previous agreements has been the buy-in of employers in both countries. International partners can provide support in the early stages, including through subsidies, to facilitate early hires and assuage employer fears over the quality and relevance of workers' skills.

Hesitations on financing: Commitment to equitable financing is a key challenge in finalizing an agreement. International partners can mobilize resources, support pilot efforts, and conduct strong impact analysis to encourage the scaling up of successful examples.

Large institutional capacity requirements: International organizations like multilateral development banks have ongoing engagements with countries on increasing institutional capacity and creating the systems that will be necessary for a country to conduct a successful bilateral training and migration agreement.

3.4.2 Financing for bilateral training and migration agreements

Global Skills Partnerships generate both fixed administrative costs and variable costs that depend on the number of participants. The total cost of an agreement will depend on the selected model and the nature of the other variable factors. Fixed costs for training include building the capacity of the education and TVET systems and labor inspectorates, and costs associated with new skills recognition processes. Fixed costs also include salaries for personnel and expanded capacity for government agencies in charge of processing visas and other migration requirements. While necessary for the functioning of the agreement, these costs are also investments in improving domestic systems. Variable costs associated with each participant in an agreement include those associated with selection and recruitment, training, passport and visa fees, travel costs, health and security checks, supportive services for integration, return and reintegration programs, as well as general project implementation and monitoring and evaluation.²⁵² These costs will increase as the number of workers increases, though achieving economies of scale could reduce the per worker price.²⁵³

In Global Skills Partnerships financing is a collaboration between all stakeholders who benefit from the outcomes. Equitable cost-sharing is one of the underlying principles and is a key point of negotiation for participating countries. Conducting the majority of training in the country of origin reduces overall costs, given price differences between the countries, but training costs should not all be assumed by the country of origin. There are many different ways to distribute costs according to both capacity and level of benefit. In addition, while public funding on behalf of both countries may be appropriate given the development benefits and positive spillovers from investing in a training and migration agreement, there is room for other stakeholders to contribute as well. The private sector gains significantly through the creation of a skilled workforce and can contribute, particularly to cover training and migration variable costs, as has been the case in previous agreements such as between Indonesia and Australia, and with German schemes to recruit health workers. The example of the Heimerer College has shown that the diaspora is also a source for investment in training and mobility, especially if it can generate positive returns for them. In certain contexts, ‘away track’ participants themselves can contribute to offset certain costs given the monetary gains they will receive from facilitated migration to a country with higher wages. These contributions can also be arranged to kick in a set time after migration, once increased earning has begun.

Global interest in managed migration means that opportunities for initial funding exist from the international community. Initial funding can be especially useful to provide proof of concept and demonstrate the added value for other stakeholders who have lower risk tolerance but would be willing to provide financing once they are convinced of the agreement’s effectiveness. For example, a

²⁵² IOM (2023).

²⁵³ Adhikari et al. (2021).

pilot program financed through official development assistance and international partners could then be scaled using public dollars.²⁵⁴ Multilateral partners have made specific commitments to support in the development of these agreements in different ways. The World Bank is committed to supporting ten Global Skills Partnerships and the EU Talent Partnerships initiative has an open call for proposals through their Migration Partnership Facility. Other pilot initiatives have been developed with partnerships between IOM and official development agencies like GIZ.

Section 3.5 The feasibility of a bilateral training and migration agreement with Austria

European Union countries are increasingly interested in Global Skills Partnerships since the launch of EU Talent Partnerships, which were announced in the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Talent Partnerships are a policy and funding framework that can be used to enhance legal pathways to the EU, focusing on mutually beneficial international mobility through better matching of labor market needs and skills between the EU and partner countries. The framework includes direct support from EU countries to citizens of partner countries to study, work, or train in the EU as a way to attract talent. At the same time, the framework also ensures that EU countries will assist in building capacity in the partner country in different areas related to mutual benefit from international mobility such as: labor market or skills intelligence, vocational education and training, the integration of returning migrants, or diaspora mobilization.²⁵⁵ The focus on the Talent Partnerships framework for managing skills and mobility means that EU countries are increasingly interested in models such as Global Skills Partnerships, that fit within it.

Austria is an example of an EU country interested in partnerships on labor mobility that could enter into a Global Skills Partnership with Kosovo. Assessing the feasibility of such an arrangement requires a look at the factors that determine whether two countries would be a good match. In addition, feasibility can be enhanced by the experience that both countries have with training and migration agreements and their current political interest. Finally, the feasibility of an agreement would also depend on financing options that are available.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ European Commission (n.d.).

Figure 28. Step 1. Identifying Austria as a potential partner country



There is a history of migration between Kosovo and Austria and a significant Kosovar diaspora still lives there. A viable country partnership can be built around policy ties, cultural linkages, and existing migration pressures, all of which can be demonstrated by migration trends. According to recent data from 2023, nearly 35,000 Kosovars currently live in Austria, which accounts for 4-5 percent of all Kosovar migrants.²⁵⁶ The history of migration and significant diaspora community have led to the creation of organizations dedicated to building bridges between the countries. Organizations such as the Kosovo-Austria Friendship Association²⁵⁷ promote cultural exchange and economic cooperation between the two countries and sponsor events for dialogue and networking. The Network of Albanian Businesses in Austria organizes events for businesses from Kosovo to present their work and products in Austria.²⁵⁸ A website launched by the Albanian diaspora in Austria offers Kosovo-made products for sale online, showing the important demand from the diaspora community.²⁵⁹ In recent years, migration from Kosovo to Austria has been primarily through visas for family reasons and there have been limited opportunities for employment-based migration. The historical linkages, diaspora organizations, and limits on recent labor migration set the foundation for a potential migration-based partnership. Austria is also uniquely well-positioned as a partner for Kosovo when compared to other main destinations for Kosovar migrants. For example, Germany is the principal host for Kosovars abroad but in recent years, it has simplified admission of migrants from the Western Balkans with legislation such as the Western Balkan Regulation, which ensures German employers can easily hire Kosovar workers of all skill levels, without the need for investment in training. In this context, developing formal migration channels in Germany such as through a Global Skills Partnership is less needed.

²⁵⁶ Eurostat.

²⁵⁷ <https://www.austria-friends.org/>

²⁵⁸ GERMIN (2023a).

²⁵⁹ USAID (2021).

The Austrian Chamber of Commerce has identified Kosovo as a priority country for partnerships focused on investment in training and the mobility of skilled workers. The identification of priority countries is part of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce’s International Skilled Workers Offensive initiative that is focused on attracting international skilled workers through win-win situations with partner countries. The program was launched to improve targeting by focusing on workers in specific sectors based on the needs of the economy and in particular countries based on ‘match’ with Austria. The match was determined based on compatibility of training systems, age structure, diplomatic relationships, and cultural affinity. The goal of the program is to build structures and partnerships, pilot projects, and evaluate ongoing efforts with country partners. Recently, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce financed a feasibility assessment of Global Skills Partnerships, carried out by IOM, that would target the identified priority countries. The assessment includes a theoretical analysis of IOM’s SMP concept and the current conditions in Austria, as well as focus group discussions and interviews with key stakeholders from Austrian institutions involved in the recruitment of foreign workers and members of the private sector in Austria. Given that Kosovo has been identified as a priority country, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce has staff based in Pristina to further foster this type of collaboration.

Austria is already investing in the skills development system in Kosovo through the Aligning Education and Training with Labor Market Needs (ALLED) Phase II program. The program, which is co-funded by the European Union and Austrian Development Cooperation, and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency aims to increase labor market participation and improve employability in Kosovo.²⁶⁰ It provides support to the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation and the Employment Agency in reforming the education and training system to link it with labor market needs and European standards. The program specifically aims to strengthen the quality and relevance of the education and training system by building cooperation with the private sector and bringing together representatives from both sides. It includes a specific focus on Vocational Education and Training (VET). In addition to strengthening the link between higher education and labor market needs, other specific objectives include improving teacher training programs to meet new requirements and priorities, enhancing the quality of applied teaching and learning in VET schools and Vocational Training Centers, and further developing Kosovo’s framework for professional qualifications.

The Austrian government is strategically focused on partnerships to attract workers from other countries in order to address domestic labor market shortages. The current shortage of qualified workers in Austria is reaching an “all-time high,” due to a combination of long-term trend factors such as the demographic ageing of the population, and short-term shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁶¹ According to the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, 82 percent of companies suffer from a shortage of skilled workers and by the year 2040, the number of people of working-age will be further reduced by 262,000. Job vacancies are on the rise and unemployment remains low.²⁶² Austria has taken steps to address these issues by increasing skilled immigration and making the process for recruiting skilled workers from abroad more efficient. In addition to the International Skilled Workers Offensive, Austria has also legislative steps to improve the process for recruiting skilled workers. This includes recent reforms in 2022 of the ‘Red-White-Red’ (RWR) card, which is the primary instrument for providing residence and work permits to foreign workers in Austria through a criteria-based point system.²⁶³ The reforms include quicker processing of applications, lower minimum salaries to qualify, a new subcategory for regular seasonal workers, loosened

²⁶⁰ <https://alled.eu/en/project/>

²⁶¹ Ebner, Moorthy Kloss, and Spiegelfeld (2023).

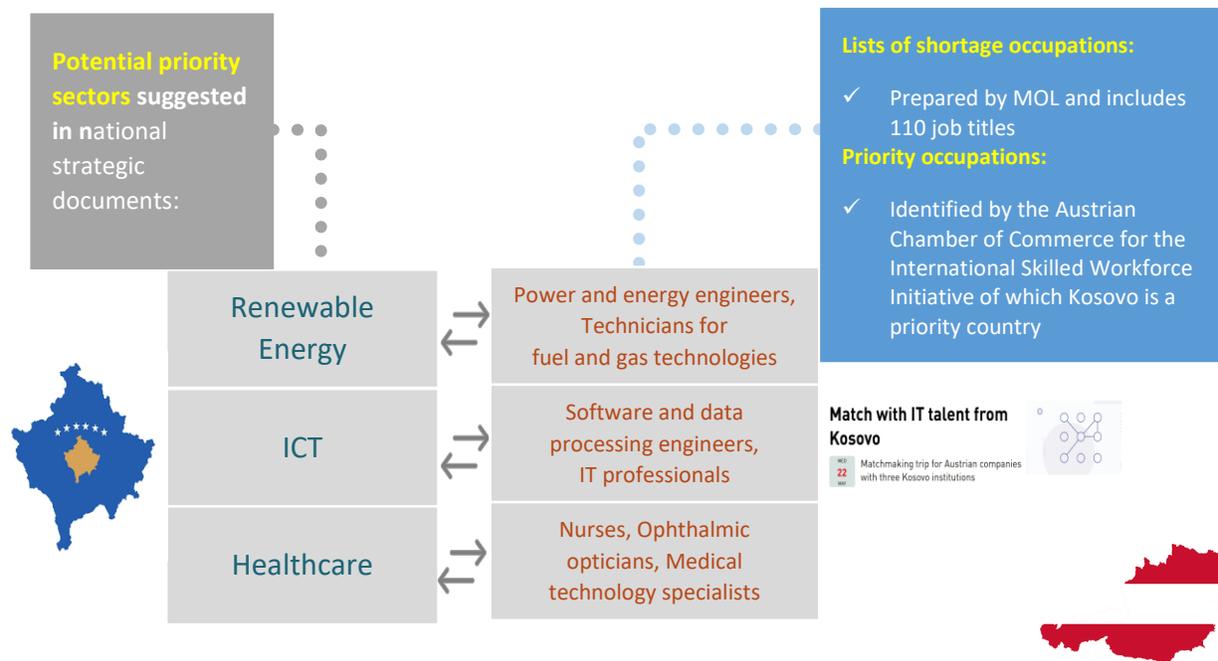
²⁶² Austrian Chamber of Commerce (2024).

²⁶³ Ebner, Moorthy Kloss, and Spiegelfeld (2023).

training requirements and recognition of relevant professional experience, an easier application process, increased points valuation of vocational training and diverse languages, permission for self-employment, and family migration opportunities, among other specific changes.²⁶⁴ The number of RWR cards issued has been increasing since 2019 (1,909 issued), especially after the reforms (almost 4,000 were issued in the first half of 2023), but is still far off the ambitious target of 15,000 issued per year by 2027.²⁶⁵

The underlying labor market conditions in Kosovo also suggest that the country could benefit from a Global Skills Partnership with Austria. A partnership with Austria focused on skill development could directly address the identified labor market challenges of inactivity, skills mismatch, and low job quality. In addition to developing more skills and talent in Kosovo, a partnership with Austria would provide an opportunity to improve training quality to EU standards in a selected sector of strategic importance that faces significant skills mismatch. There is also currently a demographic match between the young population in Kosovo and the ageing population in Austria that could benefit both countries through a regular labor pathway. A partnership with Austria would also align with stated objective outcomes from the new draft employment strategy, including a better offer of adult learning opportunities to increase the competences of the workforce and an expansion of work-based learning.

Figure 29. Step 2. Strategic initiatives in both countries can guide the choice of sector



The selection of a relevant sector of focus for a Global Skills Partnership between Austria and Kosovo would be facilitated by strategic efforts on both sides. Every year, the Ministry of Labor and Economy in Austria publishes a list of shortage occupations in need of qualified workers. For the year 2024 this list included 110 national shortage occupations as well as certain regionally specific

²⁶⁴ Work in Austria (2022).

²⁶⁵ Ebner, Moorthy Kloss, and Spiegelfeld (2023).

shortages.²⁶⁶ Identified shortage occupations are key criteria for the RWR card application process and a strategic priority for Austria. The International Skilled Workers Offensive also selects specific shortage occupations as focus sectors for their efforts to recruit from abroad. From Kosovo's perspective, the draft Employment Strategy outlines policy priorities for improving overall employment through the development of human capital, in alignment with priorities from other national strategic documents. The National Development Strategy, for example, identifies focuses on digital transformation, the shift of industry toward value added products, export-oriented investment, and transport, telecommunication, and clean energy development, while the Industrial Strategy focuses on switching to green production for better jobs in manufacturing. The Employment Strategy also asserts that the Employment Department of the Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers will take efforts to establish a skills forecasting system to determine which occupations and qualifications will be in-demand and identify labor market imbalances that may occur. Together, these strategic priorities from Austria and Kosovo create several possibilities for sectoral choice. Kosovo's focus on renewable energy overlaps with Austrian shortage occupations such as power and energy engineers, and technicians for fuel and gas technologies. Both countries are also strategically focused in ICT and healthcare. Another important logistical factor is that Austria's immigration system distinguishes between 'regulated' and 'non-regulated' professions with regards to the requirements for recognized qualifications.²⁶⁷ Regulated professions have more rigid requirements, and a Global Skills Partnership would also need to include built-in measures for the assessment of competence. Given the lengthy list of shortage occupations from Austria and various strategic focuses from Kosovo, there are opportunities to identify mutually beneficial sectors for a Global Skills Partnership.

A Global Skills Partnership with Austria would also be supported by Austria's significant experience building training systems and exporting their TVET model around the world, through the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. Under the 'Education' priority area, the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC [ADA is the implementation arm of ADC]) focuses on establishing efficient and flexible education systems that are geared toward local needs and lifelong skills development, linking primary, secondary, and tertiary education with formal and non-formal. This includes building capacity for and setting up modern national VET systems, with a focus on 'dual' vocational education and training, a model that combines both theory and practice. Key areas of work in the education priority area include institutional capacity development, a focus on specific regions and sectors, quality assurance and quality enhancement (through knowledge transfer, curriculum development, quality standards, etc.), cooperation and partnerships, and development research. Austria's experience building TVET capacity in partner countries also emphasizes harmonization with those countries' development strategies and alignment with business and industry demand, as well as international quality standards.²⁶⁸ Both the ADC and the Austrian Chamber of Commerce have ongoing engagements in Kosovo, including projects from the ADC at different levels of the education system and an office of the chamber of commerce in Pristina.

The Austrian government is also already in the process of starting a training and migration partnership with Egypt, showing commitment to an approach that ensures mutual benefits of migration. The "Eagle" project aims to invest in the skills development of the workforce in Egypt while enhancing regular pathways for migration between the two countries for mutual economic benefit. The three pillars of the project are i) the skills development of the Egyptian workforce, ii) the

²⁶⁶ For a full list of identified shortage occupations: <https://www.migration.gv.at/en/types-of-immigration/permanent-immigration/austria-wide-shortage-occupations/>

²⁶⁷ Ebner, Moorthy Kloss, and Spiegelfeld (2023).

²⁶⁸ Austrian Development Cooperation (n.d. -b); Austrian Development Cooperation (2009).

mobility of beneficiaries to Austria, and iii) enhanced integration measures for migrants arriving in Austria. Training through the project includes vocational education, intercultural competencies, language classes, and paid internships. The migration pathway includes RWR card support service, coverage of translation and application fee costs, travel arrangements, assistance in housing arrangements, and assistance with hiring. The integration aspect includes pre-departure information, post-arrival orientation, on-boarding in companies in Austria, individual counseling, a buddy program for recent arrivals, and additional training supports. Facilitated by IOM, the project is financed under the Migration Partnership Facility EU initiative with additional support from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Through the project, Austria has demonstrated a continued commitment to support the development of a dual-track vocational training systems via financial and technical assistance.

The success of the Heimerer College in translating a training and migration scheme into local economic development means that Kosovo also has valuable experience that could guide a broader effort. The Heimerer College experience provides evidence that an effort to train workers in Kosovo in an in-demand sector and align qualifications to international standards could lead to mutual benefit with a destination country. Their experience also shows that involving the Kosovar diaspora could be key to identifying strategic sectors/occupations of mutual interest and that diaspora members could offer important contributions. Kosovo's experience shows that training workers at international standards can lead to job prospects both at home and abroad, and that the technology transfer will lead to new high-quality jobs will ensure that not everyone migrates. The experience in Kosovo also shows that such an arrangement based around training and migration ends up creating new industries and services available to Kosovar citizens.

A Global Skills Partnership between Kosovo and Austria could be promising. The Kosovar government is strategically focused on addressing labor market challenges of inactivity, skills mismatch, and low levels of quality job creation – and it recognizes the potential for investing in skills development systems to do so. At the same time, the EU is increasingly interested in finding ways to partner with other countries to address growing labor market shortage - and the new Talent Partnerships framework offers a way to guide those efforts. Kosovo and Austria are apt partners in this endeavor, given the many years of linkage through migration and the growing diaspora of Kosovars in Austria that has brought the countries together and created a potential base for further collaboration. In addition, the existing presence of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce and ADC in Kosovo and their ongoing financing of training programs creates another foundation for a Global Skills Partnership. In terms of financing, between the strategic focuses of both governments, the demonstrated interest of the private sector, and the support of the international community, there are no shortage of opportunities. A Global Skills Partnership offers a unique opportunity for Kosovo to strategically integrate migration into its development strategy, through a lens of building new skills for the labor markets both in Kosovo and abroad. It builds on Kosovo's demonstrated commitment to managing migration in partnership, in a way that strengthens the domestic education and training system and ensures more Kosovars will have access to quality jobs in sectors that can strategically contribute to Kosovo's ongoing development going forward.

Conclusion

Emigration for economic opportunities has been an important phenomenon in Kosovo and it can be leveraged for development gains. With one of the highest emigration rates in the world, migration is clearly an important part of life in Kosovo. Those who migrate primarily do so in search of economic opportunities, including those who left seeking asylum and were repatriated to Kosovo. In response to the surge of asylum-seekers, the government implemented policy reforms, collaborating with destination countries to legislate a strong repatriation and reintegration system organized primarily around readmission agreements. Though the surge in Kosovars seeking asylum has ended, emigration remains an important poverty alleviation strategy. Migration brings a complex mix of development impacts which are shaped by the policies in place. Migrant families benefit from the receipt of remittances, while the Kosovo can also leverage the increase and variety of skills, international funding and global networks that the diaspora generates. On the downside, emigration can generate skill gaps in the labor market, at least in the short term, which can be addressed through to education, skill development and migration policies. The government has a new opportunity now to implement policy reforms built around the idea of a global Kosovar workforce that includes migrants who live outside its borders and all the skills, knowledge, and success they bring for the benefit of the country's development.

Embracing the idea of a Kosovar global workforce can support further development of the current system for migration governance in the country, building on past successful efforts. Kosovo has already invested in a strong legal framework to manage the process of emigration but has focused mainly on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, primarily those who sought asylum and were forced to return. Embracing the global Kosovar workforce entails the recognition that the circularity of migration flows will continue to be an important phenomenon and can be a true development asset when migrants are empowered for successful outcomes abroad. This vision opens the potential for a reform agenda to further strengthen migration governance by actively aligning it with development strategy and labor market needs, and by collaborating with destination countries to strengthen formal migration corridors that ensure the availability of skills both in Kosovo and abroad. The same reform agenda could also include an array of different policy tools for the provision of services to migrants at all stages of the migration lifecycle. By investing in migrants' preparation and success, Kosovo would strengthen the migration system in place and embrace the potential of the global workforce and their role in Kosovo's development.

Building a migration system around a global workforce is an ambitious endeavor but Global Skills Partnerships offer a concrete policy action that can lead the way for the broader set of required reforms. Among the many potential entry points for policies to empower the global Kosovar workforce, a focus on Global Skills Partnerships builds on the existing strengths of the Kosovar system, including the strong bilateral relationships already in place to manage one aspect of migration. Global Skills Partnerships are growing in popularity worldwide and Kosovo has the potential to be a global leader in collaborative agreements that link training with labor markets in both origin and destinations. While they do not represent a silver bullet to resolve all challenges associated with migration in the country, these partnerships can be an important piece to support formal migration channels while improving the availability of skills in the country, and a recognition that the global Kosovar workforce can be a catalyst for development. Migration is poised to be a key focus worldwide going forward, and Kosovo is well-positioned to build on its strong international partnerships, and its growing global workforce, to achieve its development goals.

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Annex 1. Immigration of foreign-born individuals in Kosovo

Despite increasing trends in recent years, the number of foreign nationals living in Kosovo remains relatively low. According to the most recent census in 2011, only around 4,000 people living in the country were foreign-born nationals.²⁶⁹ While this number was likely an undercount both due to methodological issues and a lack of more recent statistics, it suggests that foreign immigration to Kosovo is still not a major phenomenon. The upcoming census to be conducted in 2024 will provide a more accurate estimate of the total number of immigrants living in Kosovo.

The significant rise in regional asylum-seeking in the mid 2010's in Europe also included an increase in asylum-seekers from other countries arriving in Kosovo both to transit through and to stay. Commonly referred to as the “Balkan Route,” prospective asylum-seekers traversed through the Western Balkans on their way to the European Union. While Kosovo was not as affected as other countries in the region, the arrival of asylum-seekers also increased in recent years.²⁷⁰ As prospective asylum-seekers arrived in Kosovo, 90 percent terminated their decision or interrupted their decision by leaving Kosovo, either to return or to pass into another country.²⁷¹ The number of arrivals peaked in 2019, growing from just 147 in 2017 to over 2,000, and remained high in 2020 before dropping again (see Figure 38).

Figure A1-1. Asylum-seekers arriving in Kosovo

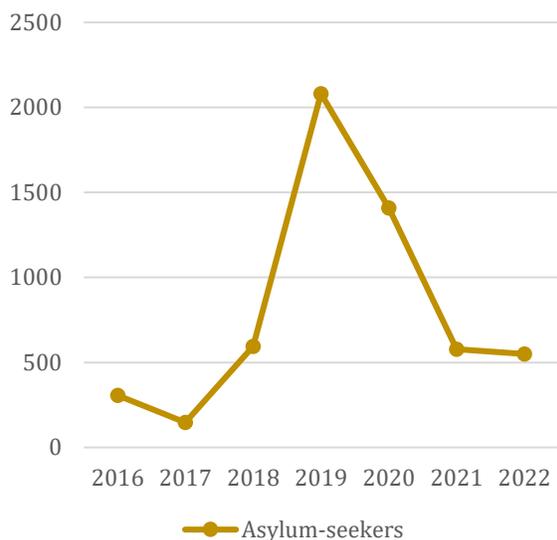
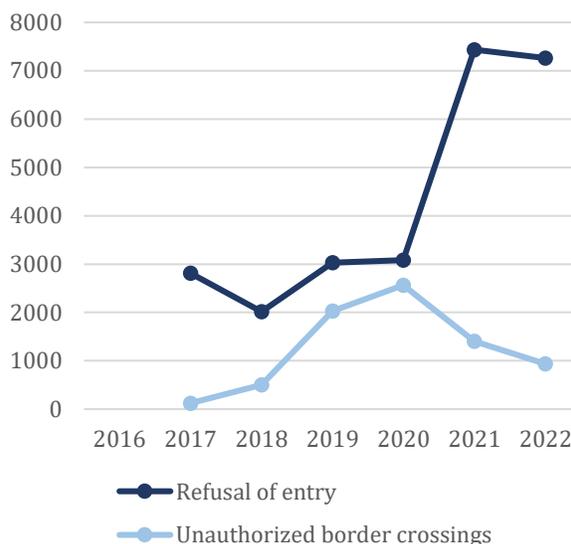


Figure A1-2. Irregular arrivals in Kosovo



Source: Government Authority on Migration.

Irregular arrivals comprising unauthorized entries and denials at border crossings have also risen in recent years. The number of unauthorized entries into Kosovo also peaked in 2019 and 2020, similar to the numbers of asylum-seekers, further evidencing the trend of those arriving in the

²⁶⁹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2014).

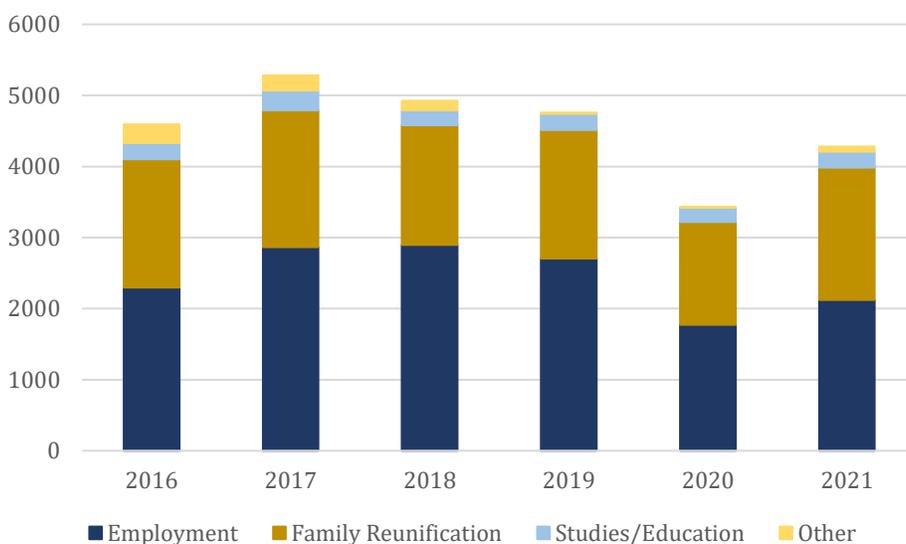
²⁷⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

²⁷¹ Government Authority on Migration (2019); (2021).

region (see Figure 39). Denials at border crossings, which includes migrants who do not have valid documents, financial means or justification for their stay, absence of visas, or entry bans, was relatively steady before seeing a significant increase in 2021.²⁷² In the Western Balkan region more broadly, more migrants continue arriving with the hopes of transiting through to reach the EU and the numbers reflect that trend. However, most recently, a decline in numbers in Kosovo is likely due to a shift in the most common route migrants are taking to pass through other countries in the Western Balkans.²⁷³

In addition to irregular migration, regular immigration has become a more important phenomenon in Kosovo in recent years, particularly for employment purposes. In 2021, Kosovo issued 4,281 temporary residence permits (Figure 40), including 1,414 first-time permits. This represented an increase of 25 percent compared to 2020 and demonstrated a return to the increasing attractiveness of Kosovo as a migration destination prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the temporary residence permits issued, 50 percent were for employment purposes and 44 percent were for family reunification, with another 5.3 percent for studies or education. In terms of permanent residence, while only 230 permits were issued in 2021, it reflects an upward trend in the last years compared to just 58 in 2018. Finally, the number of short-term work permits issued has declined in recent years due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic but was as high as nearly 500 in 2018.²⁷⁴

Figure A1-3. Temporary residence permits for foreigners in Kosovo



Source: Government Authority on Migration.

Immigrants arriving to Kosovo through regular pathways are typically from within the region while asylum-seekers and irregular entrants are more frequently from countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Half of all recipients of temporary residence permits in 2021 were from either Albania or Serbia, with another 16 percent from Türkiye, and 11 percent from North Macedonia. In terms of permanent residence permits, statistics similarly shows the prominence of regional migration. In 2021, the most frequent origin country was North Macedonia, accounting for

²⁷² Government Authority on Migration (2021).

²⁷³ IOM (2022).

²⁷⁴ Government Authority on Migration (2021).

30 percent of permanent residence permits, while in 2019 it was Albania with 21.8 percent.²⁷⁵ On the other hand, the most common origin country for asylum-seekers arriving in Kosovo has been Syria, accounting for almost 50 percent of arrivals in recent years. Significant numbers have also arrived from Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, and Palestine. Irregular entries followed a similar pattern as asylum-seekers in terms of country of origin.²⁷⁶

Profile of foreign migrants in Kosovo

The profile of a typical immigrant to Kosovo is young and male, a trend driven by the prominence of asylum-seekers among immigrants. While immigrants arriving to Kosovo with residence permits are more evenly divided between men and women, asylum-seekers tend to be mostly male (80 percent in 2019, a number that rose to 92.5 percent in 2021). In addition to being predominantly male, asylum-seekers are generally young - in 2019, two thirds of asylum-seekers in Kosovo were between the ages of 18-34 and 15 percent were under the age of 14.²⁷⁷ These data are reflective of regional trends. According to IOM, migrants traveling through the Western Balkan region are 94 percent male, 75 percent under the age of 29, 76 percent single, and 70 percent had lower secondary or primary education.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Government Authority on Migration (2019); (2021).

²⁷⁶ Government Authority on Migration (2019); (2021) and Republic of Kosovo (2021).

²⁷⁷ Government Authority on Migration (2019); (2021).

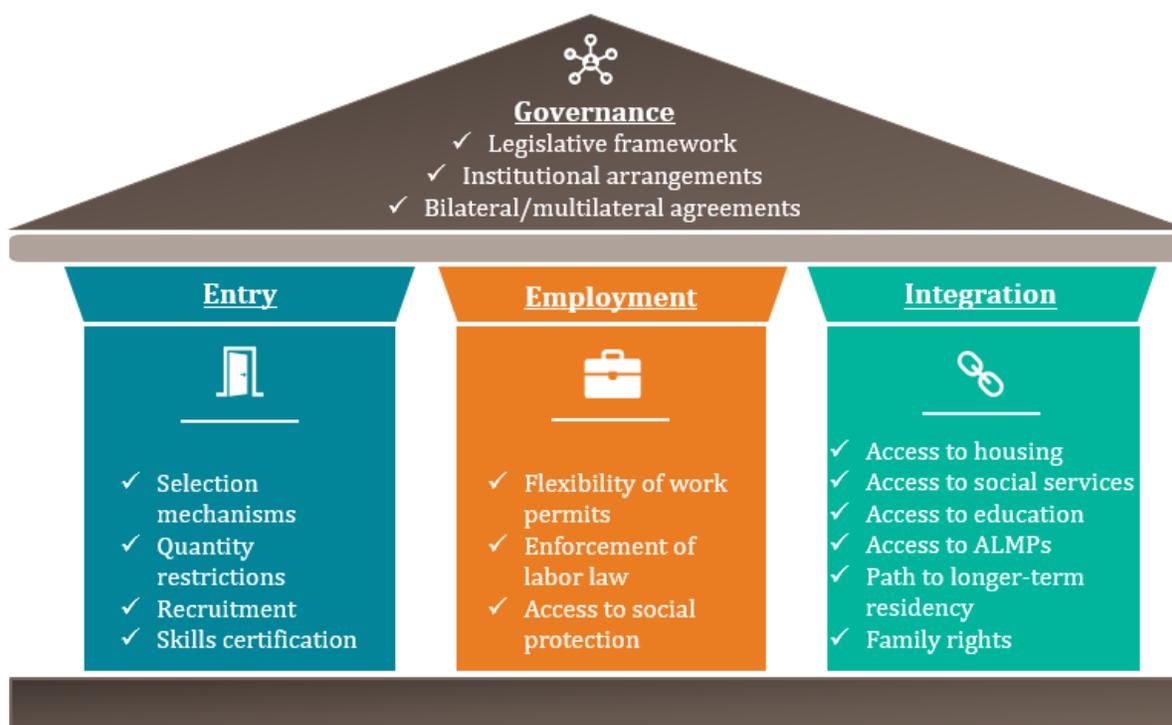
²⁷⁸ IOM (2022).

Annex 2.: Diagnostic of the Immigration System in Kosovo

A2.1. Framework to analyze the immigration system

The suitability of the migration system that regulates the entry, stay and integration of foreigners in Kosovo can also be assessed with a framework similar to the one used for emigration (see figure 34). The foundation of an immigration system is based on the governance structures of a country. These structures first include all strategies and legal documents that regulate different aspects of the immigration process, both regarding economic migrants and asylum seekers and refugees, such as the management and admission of inflows, protection of migrants, or the integration of economic migrants and refugees in the country. They also cover any bilateral or multilateral agreement regulating different migration aspects between sending and destination countries, from pre-deployment to return, including creating legal labor migration pathways, data and information sharing, skills recognitions, or training. The governance setting also includes the institutional structure which, based on national strategies and legal documents governing immigration such as laws on aliens and laws on asylum, establishes roles and responsibilities of different ministries and agencies having responsibilities in the area of immigration and asylum, as well as the different mechanisms to ensure a fluid coordination and cooperation between them.

Figure A2-1. Framework to analyze the immigration system in Kosovo



Under the governance foundation, three main pillars emerge covering the management of migration flows: entry, employment and integration. The first pillar relates to the admission system. For economic migrants, a government first decides the quantity and type of migrants entering a country in any given year by choosing quotas for different types of visas. Best practices increasingly link labor migrants' selection processes with job vacancies in specific sectors based on labor demand assessments. In order to improve the matching of skills and reduce occupational

downgrade, some countries include a system of verification and certification of migrants' skills during the entry process. At the entry stage, best-practice migration systems ensure the enforcement and implementation of regulations governing recruitment agencies to protect migrants against any potential abuse and to maintain quality of the matching between migrant workers and what firms demand. For asylum seekers, the provision of refugee status and acceptance to the country is based on legal obligations both from domestic legislation and from signed international humanitarian conventions and agreements. International humanitarian law grants rights to asylum seekers even before their case has been resolved, such as access to legal aid and basic services. During the application process, identity verification and registration protect against refoulement and allow to carry out rapid needs assessments of different groups of refugees and asylum seekers. This evaluation, in turn, facilitates the immediate provision of humanitarian assistance to cover basic needs such as shelter, cash, food, clothing, healthcare and mental care.

A second pillar covers all the employment aspects for labor migrants and refugees. Under this pillar, interventions can address migrants' barriers to accessing job opportunities. Best practices from well-developed systems include work permit arrangements and the flexibility to switch employers, the enforcement of labor regulations to protect the rights of labor migrants, early assessment and certification of qualifications, skills, and educational attainments, language training and access to specific ALMPs, and the inclusion in the different menu of social protection instruments such as pensions or unemployment benefits offered to migrants. For asylum seekers, this second phase shifts the focus from humanitarian response to more sustainable livelihoods.

The third pillar includes the longer-term socio-economic integration of migrants in the host society. Given that migrants tend to have more barriers and worse economic outcomes than the native population, integration is supported by the provision and access to national welfare systems and public services such as housing, education, health, and other social services, as well as inclusion in national ALMPs programs that facilitate their activation in the labor market. Migrants progressively have rights comparable to the native population. Interventions under this pillar tend to enhance and consolidate the economic and social integration of migrants in the host country. Ultimately, longer-term integration in host countries for those migrants who decide to stay also includes pathways for family reunification and long-term residency permits that, in some cases, can lead to citizenship.

Following this framework, sub-section 2.2.2 assesses all the relevant legislative framework, including strategies, laws and regulations, and bilateral and multilateral agreements, that cover the issue of immigration in Kosovo. Sub-section 2.2.3 analyzes the institutional framework of all different ministries and agencies in Kosovo that have a mandate to regulate, cover or provide services to immigrants. Sub-section 2.2.4 studies the system of entry, stay and employment, and integration of foreign-born workers and the provision of services throughout the different stages of migration to enhance migrants' socio-economic outcomes in Kosovo.

A2.2. Legislative framework for immigration

Kosovo's legislative framework for immigration and asylum is also grounded in the National Strategy on Migration 2021-2025, which recognizes the evolving importance of managing immigration for the country's development trajectory. The strategy's four main objectives include a recognition of the increasing prominence of immigration and need to address new challenges and opportunities. The first strategic objective on regular migration management specifically includes measures to strengthen the integration of foreigners. The second strategic

objective on safe, orderly, and regular migration includes measures on enhancing the system for entry and stay of foreign citizens in Kosovo and the fourth strategic objective includes a specific focus on building capacity for effective and timely decision-making on international protection, as well as generally improving management and the use of data.

Immigration of foreign citizens

The State Strategy on Integrated Border Management ensures border management in line with EU and international policies. It focuses on cooperation within and between authorities and with international actors to coalesce into a system that ensures the integrated nature of border management. The strategy establishes a basis for border crossing points that fulfill EU standards for the flow of people, as well as migration and asylum. It governs cooperation in the field of migration and the issuance of visas, harmonizing with the national strategy on migration for the management of regular and irregular migration, and defining the role of the border police in cooperation with other authorities and international organizations like UNHCR and IOM. It also includes a focus on the visa system that has been applied by Kosovo and the processing of visas in advance of arrival at the border, or in certain rare cases, the issuance of visas at the border itself.²⁷⁹

Immigration is also addressed through other national strategies that focus on the prevention of transnational crimes and management of borders. The State Strategy against Organized Crime 2018-2022 addresses immigration and includes specific objectives to combat the trafficking of especially arms and narcotics, which can enter the country with migrants.²⁸⁰ The National Strategy Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2022-206 also recognizes the need for increased enforcement along with Kosovo's changing role from being mainly a country of origin to now being a country of destination and transit. It focuses on activities that provide supportive services to victims, as well as strengthening institutional mechanisms.²⁸¹

The legal basis for the entry and stay of foreigners is established under the Law on Foreigners and the Regulation on the Integration of Foreigners, which also include the necessary procedures and criteria. The Law No.04/L-219 on Foreigners defines different classes of foreigners in Kosovo, including those under international protection, and establishes the rules on travel documents and the issuance of documents to those who do not have them. It establishes a visa regime with 88 countries, conducted through 16 diplomatic and consular missions of Kosovo, that regulates the timing and frequency of entry of foreigners, as well as a Visa Information System that stores and processes data on visas. The law assigns responsibility for managing the entrance of foreigners to the Border Police and includes processes for the return and removal of those with unauthorized residence, following the principles of non-refoulement and the right to appeal.²⁸²

The Regulation (GRK) No. 09/2019 for the Integration of Foreigners guarantees the right to integration activities and services for those with legal basis in Kosovo. Those with legal basis include anyone with temporary or permanent residence and those under international protection statuses, including applicants for protection. Those with temporary residence can have access to education, free legal aid, employment, and vocational training. On top of this, migrants with a permanent residence permit also have access to social welfare and have the right to associate and become a member of an organization representing workers. Foreigners with legal residence in

²⁷⁹ Republic of Kosovo (2020b).

²⁸⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2018d).

²⁸¹ Republic of Kosovo (2022).

²⁸² Republic of Kosovo (2013).

Kosovo can register as jobseekers with the Employment Agency. The regulation assigns responsibility for the integration of foreigners to the Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, renaming the department to reflect the inclusion of foreigners in addition to repatriated persons. The regulation also expects that the integration of foreigners will be included in the CMS tracking system and that municipalities will provide support through the MOCRs.²⁸³

The alignment of Kosovo’s legislative framework with international standards also has relevance for immigration. The national strategy aims to further harmonize with the Global Compact on Migration through exploring additional procedures for returning irregular migrants, including to countries that do not recognize Kosovo. In addition to alignment with the Global Compact, the strategy was also designed to reflect objectives and measures from Global Compact on Refugees and the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Asylum

The legislative framework for immigration in Kosovo also includes a specific focus on ensuring that Kosovo can fulfill the role of a safe country for asylum seekers who arrive. Law No. 06/L-026 on Asylum ensures that all foreign nationals and stateless persons who wish to apply for international protection in Kosovo have the right to do so. It provides for special supports for vulnerable groups and those needing assistance to represent their cases. It also affords free movement within Kosovo up until the final decision, unless in specific cases when detainment at the detention center is required. The law governs the relationship between state authorities and the UNHCR and assigns responsibility to the Department for Citizenship, Asylum, and Migration in the Ministry of Internal Affairs for management of asylum and decision-making on asylum cases, as well as the management of the Center for Asylum that provides accommodation and medical examination. The law enshrines the process for decisions and appeals and mandates that a database be kept containing all data on applicants, applications, and any appeals. Finally, the law ensures the rights of asylum seekers to reside in Kosovo and not be returned to their country of origin, access to shelter, healthcare, social assistance, legal aid, education, employment and vocational training.²⁸⁴ These needs are addressed by the Center for Asylum. Those with refugee or subsidiary protection have the same rights to services as long as their protection lasts, and they also have the right of family reunification and naturalization.

As part of the ongoing cooperation between the EU and Kosovo, the framework for asylum has been strengthened to align with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and EU standards. The Roadmap for Cooperation between EUAA-Kosovo 2022-2024 is a document that was developed to guide the process and properly ensure the implementation of recommendations. As part of the alignment with CEAS standards, a new Temporary Reception Centre for asylum-seekers arriving in Kosovo was authorized to be established. The roadmap also led to strengthened access to asylum procedures for all, including those with special needs and it provided guidance on how to enhance the quality of decision-making through improvements in knowledge, technical skills, and capacity. It also laid out how to strengthen the reception system to improve conditions and align with EU standards and to enhance preparedness for a scenario of a high influx of asylum-seekers, including with a contingency plan that expands the capacity of three asylum centers.²⁸⁵

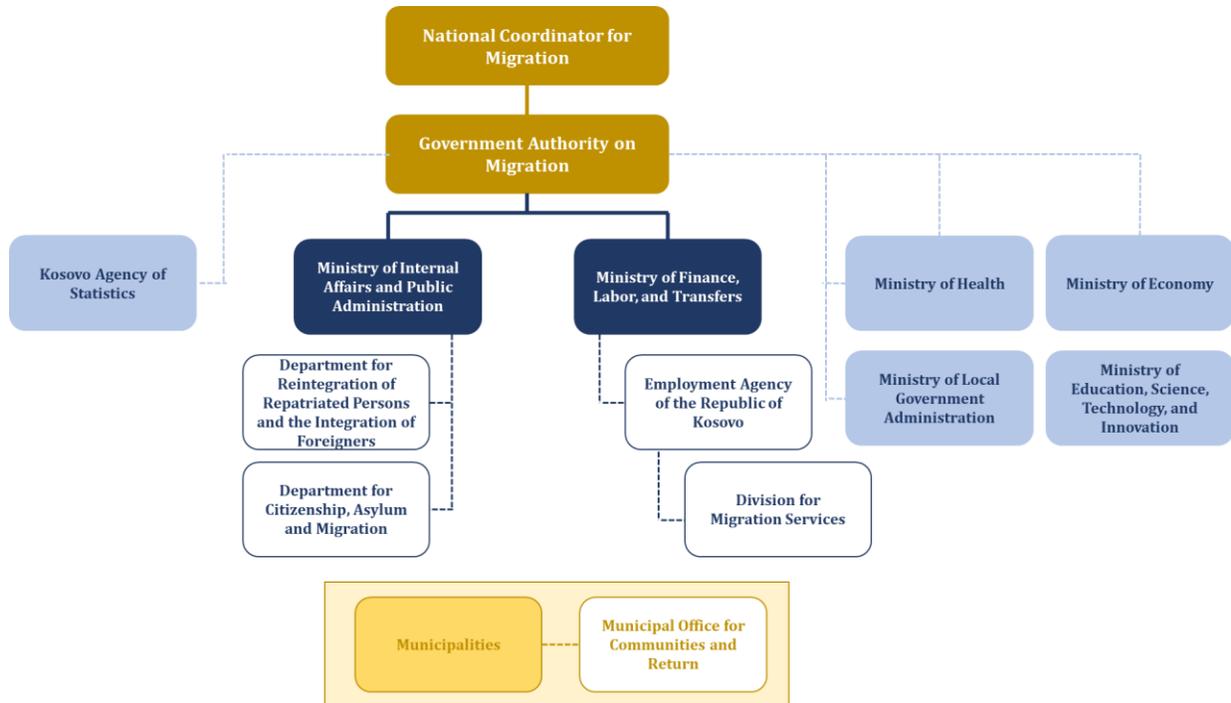
²⁸³ Republic of Kosovo (2019b).

²⁸⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2018b).

²⁸⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum and Republic of Kosovo (2022).

A2.3. Institutional setting for immigration and asylum

Figure A2-2. Organizational framework for migration management



Both the National Coordinator for Migration and the Government Authority on Migration also monitor and provide expertise on topics related to immigration of foreigners. Their role recognizes the expanded need for institutions to address increasing flows of labor migration and asylum-seeking.

At the ministry level, Kosovo has assigned responsibility to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) as the main ministry in charge of drafting policy and managing immigration. This responsibility includes controlling and managing overall migratory movements through border crossing points and overseeing the immigration of foreigners and the reception of asylum-seekers, including the management of the national reception center.

Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, issues related to services provided for the integration of immigrants in Kosovo are managed by the Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners (DRRPIF). Originally focused on repatriated persons, the DRRPIF was expanded to include the integration of foreigners in 2019, recognizing the important progress made on designing a high-level system for providing services to those coming to Kosovo.

The Department for Citizenship, Asylum, and Migration (DCAM), also within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is in charge of policy related to international protection, dividing responsibility between multiple divisions. The purpose of the department is to implement policy related to immigration and asylum, including bilateral agreements, citizenship, international protection, and the right of foreigners to stay in Kosovo, including granting approval for issuance and extensions of visas upon request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora. As part of repatriation process, the DCAM accepts, reviews, and verifies requests for re-admission and submits

them to other countries in accordance with readmission agreements. The DCAM also manages the temporary reception center for asylum-seekers. Within the DCAM, the Division for Asylum, manages legislation related to asylum and the implementation of asylum policy. It also makes decisions on international protection status awards and manages the data of those who apply for and are rewarded status. The Division for Citizenship manages the process of acquiring citizenship for foreigners and decides on requests. The Division for Migration Data Management collects and analyzes data related to immigration and asylum-seekers who are arriving to Kosovo.

Municipalities play an important role providing services related to the integration of foreigners. The role of the MOCRs in supporting communities was expanded to also focus on creating communities that support the integration of foreigners. Building off the success of the institutional system designed for the reintegration of repatriated persons, the MOCRs play a similar role for foreigners, advising, assisting, and providing services for foreigners in each municipality. The MOCR is the primary point of contact for a foreigner in need of integration schemes when they arrive at their municipality.

The Ministry of Local Government Administration assists in providing information to the municipalities on the integration of foreigners and in drafting training plans and organizing training courses. Given the differences in providing integration services for foreigners compared to reintegration services for Kosovars returning, there is an increased need to provide training and capacity building to municipalities to accommodate the increased responsibilities.

The Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers (MFLT) also supports the management of economic migration of foreign workers in Kosovo. Responsibilities for the MFLT include assessing the financial implications of migration policy. They are also responsible for drafting employment and vocational training policy. The MFLT is also home to the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo, which plays an important role in migration issues.²⁸⁶

Labor market services are the responsibility of the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), which includes services to facilitate short-term employment of foreign workers. For immigrants, the EARK facilitates the provision of short-term employment permits for foreign workers that are valid for up to 90 days in a 180-day period. The EARK is also responsible for managing mobility agreements for employment purposes, especially those that exist within the region.²⁸⁷ Immigrants can also access other active labor market programs open to the general unemployed population.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and the Ministry of Health play a similar role for the integration of foreigners as they do for the reintegration of returning migrants. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is responsible for integrating immigrants of school age into the educational system and the Ministry of Health provides healthcare services for eligible foreigners.²⁸⁸

The Kosovo Agency of Statistics also play a key role for migration due to the collection of data in areas related to the movement of people. Data that are relevant to migration can be found across multiple institutions because they intersect with different aspects of society. The Agency of Statistics collects and analyzes statistics related to the movement of people from one place to another, including international and internal migration. It periodically produces statistics on the number of

²⁸⁶ Republic of Kosovo (2021).

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

immigrants, their age and sex profile and country of origin, and annual net migration flows (inflows minus outflows) by municipality.

A2.4. System of entry, stay and integration of immigrants and provision of services

Entry system for economic migrants and right to work

The Law on Foreigners regulates the different residency and work permits for migrants. According to the law, a foreigner can stay in Kosovo after entry for a period of no more than three months in a six-month period with a valid visa or residence permit. It establishes short-term, temporary, and permanent residence permits available to foreigners. The short-term permit is valid for three months, the temporary permit is valid for one or three years for purposes of education, research, humanitarian grounds, family reunification, or employment and is renewable for refugee purposes. The permanent permit is granted to those who have held temporary residence for five years continuously. The employment of foreigners is legislated under the law and the right to work is granted along with permits issued for residence and employment. An annual quota for work permits is determined in accordance with labor market needs and migration policy. In theory, work permits can also be revoked if the employer has refused to hire a jobseeker from the Employment Agency who met the prescribed conditions. In addition, those with permanent residence, refugee status, subsidiary protection status, or other humanitarian grounds are exempted from the need for a work permit and allowed to work.

Services for asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants

For asylum-seekers arriving to Kosovo, a strengthened reception system aligned with EU standards provides immediate reception services and ensures that those with international protection status have the same rights to health and education services as citizens. Asylum-seekers are provided with free health services, legal and administrative assistance, psychosocial assistance, food, clothing, hygiene kits, and other physical assistance. During 2021, medical services were provided to 1,257 beneficiaries, 530 received free legal services, and 575 accessed social counselling services.²⁸⁹ Additional specific measures for integration that are provided include needs assessments, language courses, integration courses, and accommodation.²⁹⁰ The infrastructure for offering services to asylum-seekers has grown considerably as Kosovo has sought to fill the role of a 'safe haven' for those seeking asylum. This has included specific government programs responding to immediate needs such as the 'Journalists in Residence' project that has sheltered 13 journalists from Ukraine in Kosovo in 2022.²⁹¹

The mechanism for providing services to foreigners with international protection status was designed to be incorporated into the system for providing services to repatriated Kosovars. Building off the success of the case management system, the mandate of DRRPIF to provide reintegration services was expanded to include the integration of foreigners – though it is particularly focused on those with refugee or temporary protection status. In the case of foreigners, DRRPIF receives notification from DCAM (similarly to the repatriation process) when someone has received protective status. The asylee then receives a needs assessment to determine if there are immediate needs and is transferred to a municipality for further services. Compared to repatriated

²⁸⁹ Government Authority on Migration (2021).

²⁹⁰ Republic of Kosovo (2019b).

²⁹¹ Government Authority on Migration (2023).

migrants who are returning home to their municipalities, the system for providing services to foreigners requires more central involvement but efforts are underway to decentralize services, encourage relocation to municipalities beyond those with the largest cities, and provide training to municipal staff in working with foreigners and providing the mandated services.

Given increases in arrivals of foreign workers, there is interest in improving the integration of labor immigrants by connecting them to available services. Article 8 of Regulation No. 09/2019 for the Integration of Foreigners set forth various measures to ensure that services are available for foreigners to access both public services and specific integration measures. In order to benefit from an integration scheme, a foreigner must have legal residence and not have benefitted from a similar scheme from a local or international organization. The regulation also contains provisions to provide additional services to vulnerable persons or those with special needs.²⁹² According to the most recent migration profile from the Government Authority on Migration, 253 foreigners received integration assessments and additional services such as free legal aid, accommodation, food and hygiene packages, clothing, social assistance, psychosocial support, health services, Albanian language courses, and Covid-19 vaccines were all offered in a limited capacity. The most commonly accessed service was free legal aid, which was required by 128 foreigners in 2021.²⁹³ Labor migrants who have residence permits also have access to specific measures of integration, including employment services, that are also available to those under international protection.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Republic of Kosovo (2019b).

²⁹³ Government Authority on Migration (2021).

²⁹⁴ Republic of Kosovo (2019b).