

# HEALTH SECTOR IN KOSOVO: The emigration of doctors and healthcare workers

- Kosovo has the lowest number of specialty doctors per capita in Europe and has one of the lowest rates of health expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as well as the lowest number of 4 patients treated.
- During the years 2019 and 2020, 352 health workers were provided with a work permit in Germany<sup>1</sup>
- From 2018 to September 2022, the Chamber of Doctors of Kosovo has issued 666 certificates of ethics and profession, a document which is required by the health institutions of host countries for immigrants. Of these, 105 certificates were issued in 2020, while 183 were issued until September 2022.
- During the year 2021, 140 certificates were issued by the Chamber of Nurses of Kosovo. The number of certificates issued until September 2022 has quadrupled to 586.
- Many of the existing hospital capacities, whether technical or human, have remained unused due to patients' lack of trust in the public sector.
- Kosovo lacks accurate data and a comprehensive assessment of the main factors of emigration, which would identify the problems and provide adequate solutions.
- 59% of Kosovo's citizens would prefer to live abroad, of which 56% are in preparation to migrate.<sup>2</sup>

Emigration of Kosovo citizens and the working class continues to be a major challenge for institutions, society, and, in particular for the healthcare sector. Regardless of the legal framework and mechanisms built to coordinate and implement policies on migration, there are no sufficient institutional measures to address the concerning number of citizens leaving the country.<sup>3</sup> The absence of favourable working conditions in the public sector, low salaries and the inconsistency of the educational curriculum with the requirements of the labour market have in consequence brought forth a “brain drain”, causing the emigration of a large number of doctors and other healthcare professionals. The issue has directly affected the economic development of the country and raised the need for immediate action by institutions.

Deficiencies in the public healthcare sector have damaged the overall well-being of the citizens, which as a result led to the migration of many to ensure better living conditions and easier access to healthcare services.

Unemployment and difficult economic conditions are two of the main reasons for the increase in emigration. Following the inability of citizens of working age to secure a job, emigration has simultaneously served as a valve to release the pressure created in the job market.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, growing demands for the labour force in developed countries have encouraged regular migration, facilitating an easier integration of doctors and healthcare workers from abroad. Curbing this migration trend requires an increase in the budget for the health sector, ensuring higher wages and new workplaces. The situation may deteriorate in the absence of adequate institutional measures and an effective management strategy.

1 The Guardian, Europe's south and east worry more about emigration than immigration – poll, 1 April 2019, at <https://bit.ly/2OItn9e>

2 Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022, Sarajevo, June 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3Ds00BL>

3 Balkans Group, Kosovo: Migration trends require a new strategic approach, September 2020.

4 World Bank, Republic of Kosovo - Systematic Country Diagnostic, January 2017, at <https://bit.ly/3FDhzkR>

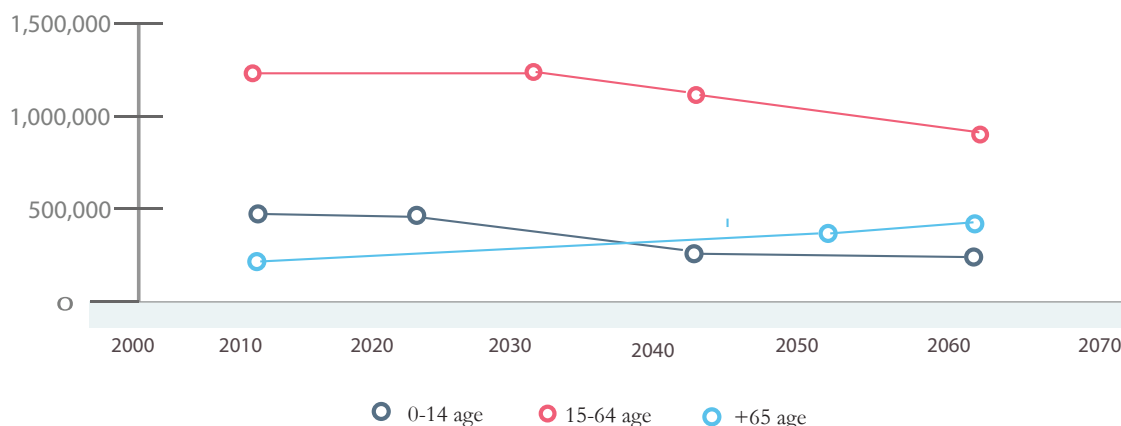
Kosovo institutions should take concrete steps to ensure efficient management of migration trends and to prevent workforce migration in the health sector, including:

- An increase in the budget for the health sector is needed to bring it closer to the EU average of 9.9% of the Gross Domestic Product. Currently, Kosovo spends 4.4% of its GDP on the health sector. A factor that would contribute to the increase in financing of the health sector is the implementation of the law on health insurance.
- Salaries for health workers should increase urgently and in similar trends to other countries in the region and other European countries (doctors, nurses, etc.).
- Scholarships for specialisation abroad should be offered, provided that the grantees return to serve and become employed in the country's public health system for a certain period.
- Immediate employment of general doctors should be applied after completing their studies. The recent graduates could assist specialty doctors and gain experience at the same time, which would contribute to the prevention of emigration.
- Specialty doctors should be included in the regular salary system to improve services. This would ensure greater inclusion of medical specialists in the health system.
- The Governmental Authority for Migration should advance its data on the migration profile. Additionally, it should improve inter-institutional cooperation to increase opportunities for health workers and prevent emigration.

## POPULATION, LABOR FORCE AND MIGRATION

According to the last population census of 2011, Kosovo has 1.7 million inhabitants. The next population census is expected to take place during the second half of 2023, but according to the most recent estimates from the Kosovo Agency for Statistics (KAS), Kosovo had 1.8 million residents at the end of 2021.<sup>5</sup> According to projections for the coming decades, Kosovo's population is expected to be less than 1.5 million by 2061.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the population decline, it is predicted that the average age will also increase and the population of citizens over 65 years old will be higher than that of citizens up to 14 years old. Likewise, a decline in the working-age population is also predicted.

Graph no. 1: Population estimate by age group (median estimate), 2011-2061



Source: BPRG, based on data from KAS

The primary causes of this shift are the decline in the birth rate and migration. The overall birth rate will fall from 2.41 to less than 2 by 2031, according to the KAS.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, between 2013 and 2021, nearly 300,000 Kosovars emigrated (returnees not included).<sup>8</sup>

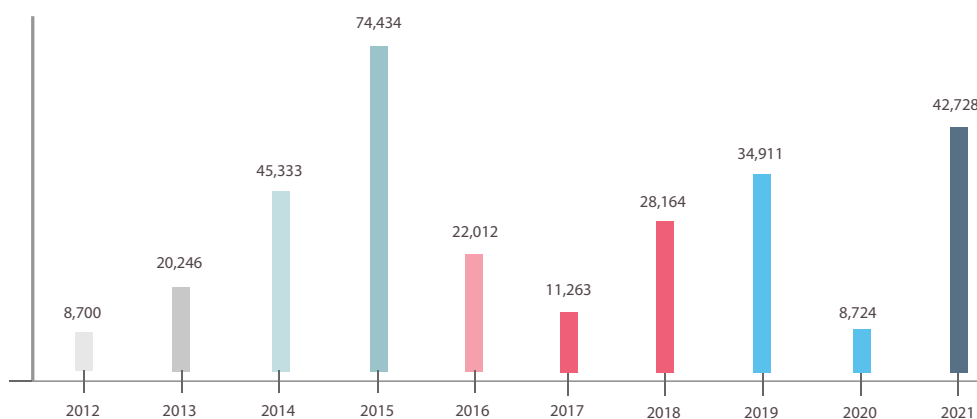
5 Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Kosovo's population 2021 – evaluation, June 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3foA3Lv>

6 Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Forecast of Kosovo's population 2017-2061, December 2017, Prishtina, at <https://bit.ly/3fujyjh>

7 Ibid

8 Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Population assessment reports, 2013-2021, at <https://bit.ly/3fspC9I>

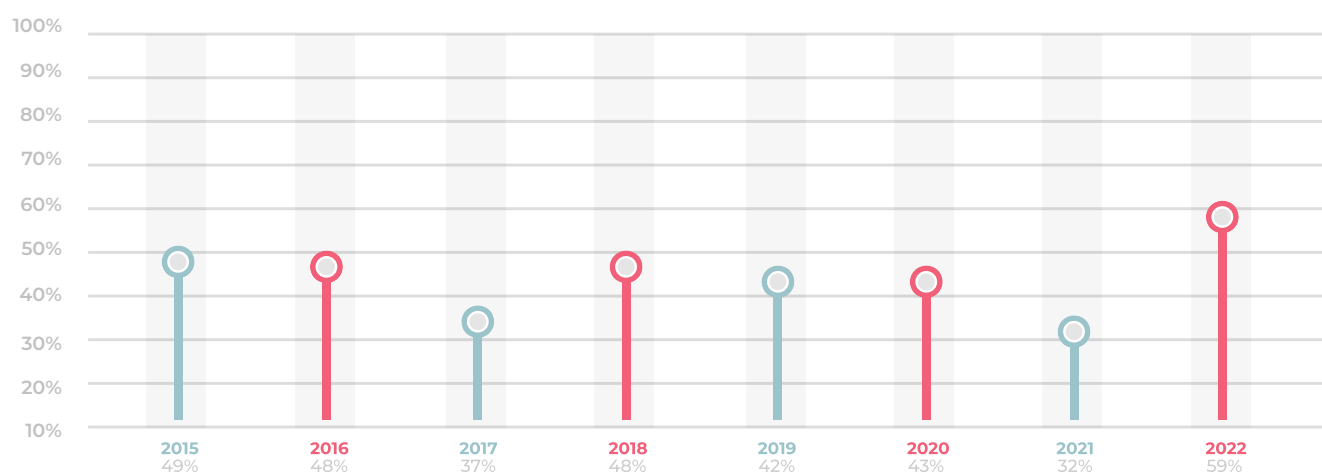
Graph no. 2: International emigration



Source: BPRG, based on KAS report on population assessment

Kosovars have the highest preference for migration among Western Balkans (WB) countries. According to Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) opinion polls for 2022, 59% of Kosovars would prefer to live and work abroad.<sup>9</sup> 56% of those who have expressed a desire to work and live abroad are already in various stages of planning to migrate. The majority would prefer to emigrate to EU countries (67%), while the rest prefer the United States (17%) and other WB countries (14%).

Graph no. 3: Percentage of those who would choose to live and work abroad



Source: BPRG, based on the Migration Profile Light reports for the years 2018 and 2020

The 25-44 age group has been the most common to emigrate over the last decade, accounting for 44% of the emigrating population. This is the prime reproductive age in terms of fertility and labour force.<sup>10</sup> More than half of those granted residence permits in EU countries applied for family reunification (51%), 26.4% for employment purposes, 1.5% for educational purposes, and 21% for other reasons.<sup>11</sup>

In the years 2014-2015 there was a big wave of irregular emigration, but starting from 2016, there has been an increasing trend of regular emigration.

Among the reasons for the decline in irregular emigration and the increase in regular emigration is a shift in EU and member-state policies following the 2014-2015 irregular migration wave, when many EU countries tightened asylum policies and accelerated return procedures for irregular migrants.

In 2015, Germany approved the “Western Balkan Regulation,” which opened the labor market to Balkan workforce and increased regular emigration from Kosovo. This regulation was supposed to expire in 2020, but it was

<sup>9</sup> Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2022, Sarajevo, June 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3Ds00BL>

<sup>10</sup> Governmental Authority for Migration, Extended migration profile 2013-2017, Prishtina, December 2018, at <https://bit.ly/3zEsgik>

<sup>11</sup> Governmental Authority for Migration, Light migration profile 2020, Prishtina, 2021, at <https://bit.ly/3U3Xbh8>

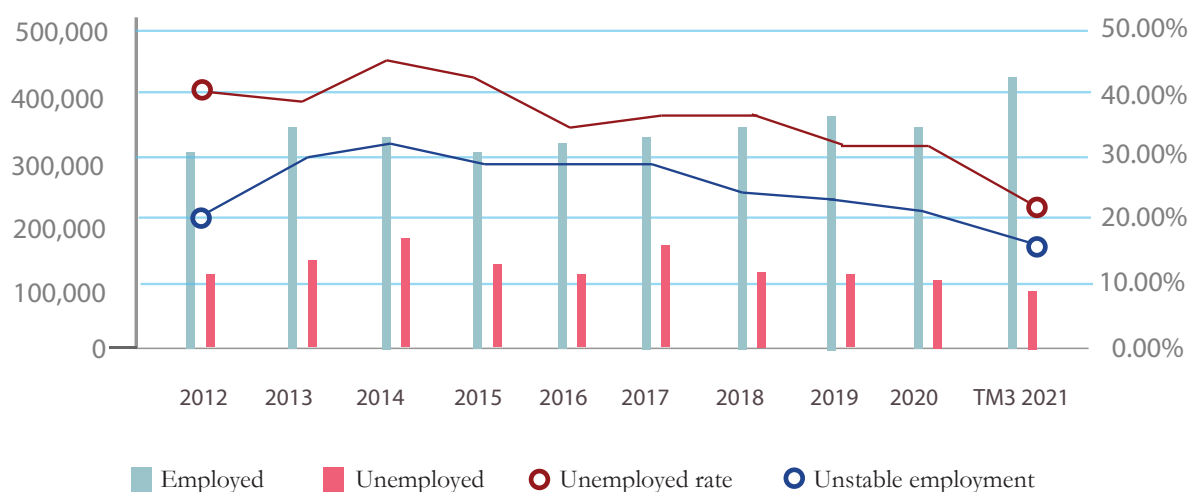
extended until 2023. Because of the regulations in place, it is now easier for unskilled workers to find work in Germany. While foreign workers with no qualifications made up 28% of the German labor force in 2012, they increased to 36% in 2018.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Western Balkan Regulation, between 2016 and 2020, 28.2% of the 320,489 employment contracts signed between German employers and WB job seekers were from Kosovo (92,655 employment contracts secured).<sup>13</sup> However, not everyone who received work contracts was able to get started. The reason for this was documentation errors, as well as a lack of capacity in German embassies to issue visas to all those with valid employment contracts. In the end, 21,435 work visas were issued for the same time period (22.4% of work visa applicants).<sup>14</sup>

The emigration of Kosovo citizens continues in the same trend despite the official data offered by the Kosovo Agency for Statistics, which shows that in the last years there has been an increase in employment and job openings in Kosovo. Nevertheless, Kosovo is the only WB country that still retains a net increase in the labour force while all other countries face a decrease.<sup>15</sup>

This growth is present for the reason that Kosovo has a high percentage of its population in the 0-14% age group, but as depicted in Graph 1, after 2030 there will be a significant decrease in the labour force if the current emigration trends continue.

Graph no. 4: Employment and unemployment rate in Kosovo, 2012 - 2021



Source: BPRG, based on KAS data for the labour market, 2012 - 2021

According to the data, a lack of jobs is not the only reason for emigration; there are other factors as well. Kosovo citizens are increasingly concerned about the state of their country's education, health, and the rising rate of emigration.

Most employees have net salaries between 400 and 500 euros per month. The average net salary in Kosovo is 432 euros, while salaries in the public sector and public enterprises are higher (611 euros net) than in the private sector (376 euros net).<sup>16</sup>

## THE DEMAND FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

There are large movements of doctors within the EU countries. The biggest beneficiaries of health worker migration are the member countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which consists of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. As a result of population ageing and increased life expectancy, all other EU countries are looking for health workers.<sup>17</sup> According to a report, half of EU member states have a shortage

12 GAP Institute, The emigration of Kosovo's labour force to Germany, Prishtina, February 2020.

13 GAP Institute, How will the Covid-19 pandemic and Germany's new immigration cap affect Kosovo's labour migration? Prishtina, April 2021.

14 Ibid.

15 Aspen Institute, Emigration from Western Balkans, 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3T0yjpq>

16 Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Wage level in Kosovo 2021, at <https://bit.ly/3sUSRF3>

17 The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Health Professionals Wanted: Chain Mobility across European Countries, June 2020, at

of workers in the health sector, and in most countries, doctors are approaching retirement age.<sup>18</sup>

Table no. 1: Lack of health workers in some EU countries and Britain

	Belgium	Denmark	Germany	Ireland	France	Netherlands	Finland	UK	Estonia	Bulgaria	Croatia	Letonia	Lithuania	Slovenia	Slovakia
Doctors															
Nurses & Midwives															
Other healthcare workers															

Source: BPRG, based on The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies report  
*\*The highlighted areas show where there is an absence of healthcare workers*

By 2030, in all EU countries, demands for health professionals will increase for two reasons: to replace the retiring workers and to expand health services as a result of population ageing and increased life expectancy.<sup>19</sup> EU countries are compensating for the lack of health workers by hiring workers from other countries. In 2017, one in ten doctors in EU countries was born abroad. In Ireland, half of the doctors were born abroad; in Switzerland and Sweden, one in three doctors were born abroad; in Austria 5%, Italy 1%, etc.<sup>20</sup>

The disparity in pay for health workers is a major factor in the migration of doctors within EU countries as well as emigration from third countries. With the decline in pay for health workers in recent years, 4% of employees in this sector in the United Kingdom have left the country. Yet, taking into account that wages in this sector are still higher than in other countries, Britain has managed to compensate for the emigration by hiring healthcare workers from Italy, Greece, Portugal, and other South-Eastern European countries.<sup>21</sup> Due to the high compensations for health workers, Norway and Sweden are attractive countries for healthcare workers from EU15 countries. Switzerland, which pays health workers twice as much as the EU15 countries,<sup>22</sup> is attractive to health workers from Germany, France, Italy, and Austria; while Norway has managed to attract health workers from Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary. Germany and other EU15 countries attract healthcare workers from other Central and South-Eastern European countries, especially from the Western Balkan countries.<sup>23</sup>

Table no. 2: Data on health workers and the rate of emigration from the five WB countries

	2010	2017
Albania	7 %	18 %
Bosnia and Herz.	8 %	14 %
Serbia	4 %	8 %
N. Macedonia	17 %	22 %
Montenegro	0 %	3 %

Source: The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies

The gap, in terms of average income between the health sector in Western Balkans (WB) and EU countries, remains high enough to continue the high rates of migration of health professionals. In 2018, the average salaries in the health and social work sector in the WB countries were two to three times lower than the average salaries in the same sector in the EU countries. Health workers in Albania and Serbia are paid almost three times less than those in Germany. Bosnia has experienced the largest departure of health workers compared to other Balkan countries, and in recent years has significantly increased salaries in this sector, but still, they remain half of the salaries in Germany.<sup>24</sup>

<https://bit.ly/3WtsVxR>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Health Professionals Wanted: Chain Mobility across European Countries, June 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3WtsVxR>

21 Ibid.

22 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK.

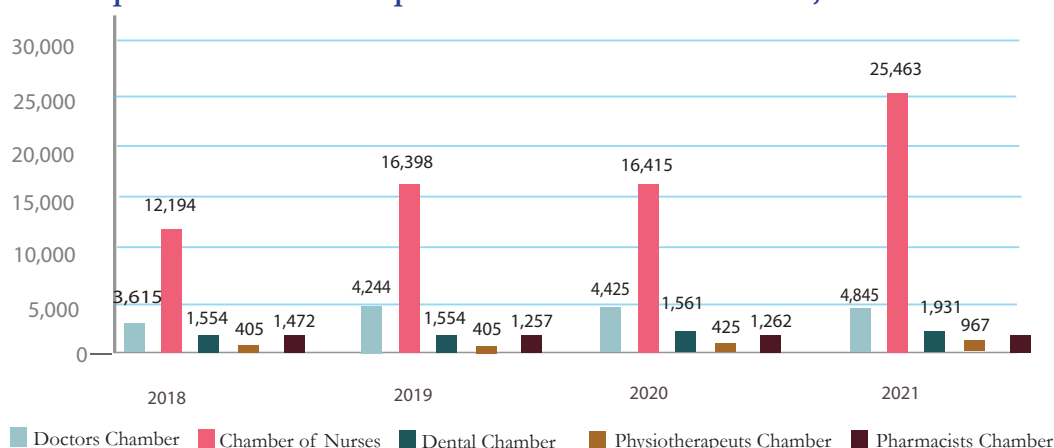
23 The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Health Professionals Wanted: Chain Mobility across European Countries, June 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3WtsVxR>

24 Ibid.

## THE STATE OF THE HEALTH SECTOR IN KOSOVO

KAS data show that in Kosovo, in 2021, 34,468 health workers were members of the five main associations of health workers.<sup>25</sup> The Law on Chambers of Health Professionals has established five chambers and membership in them is mandatory for healthcare professionals.<sup>26</sup>

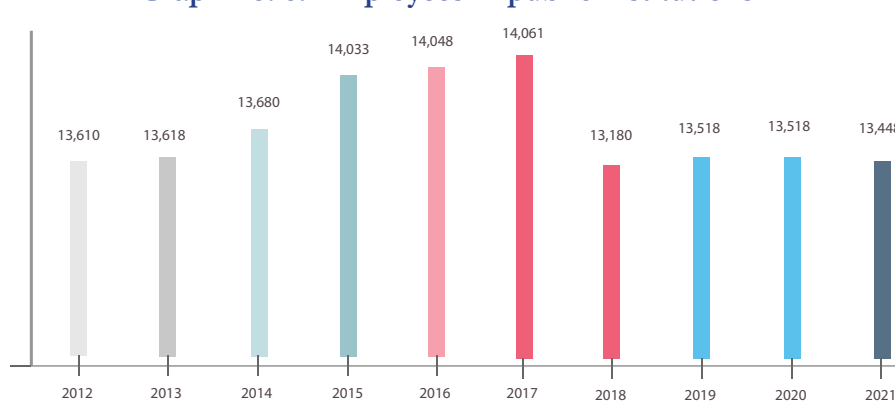
**Graph no. 5: Membership in health worker associations, 2018 - 2021**



Source: BPRG, based on KAS reports on health, 2018 - 2021

There are 13,448 employees in public health institutions as of 2021. The number of employees in the public sector has been decreasing since 2017.

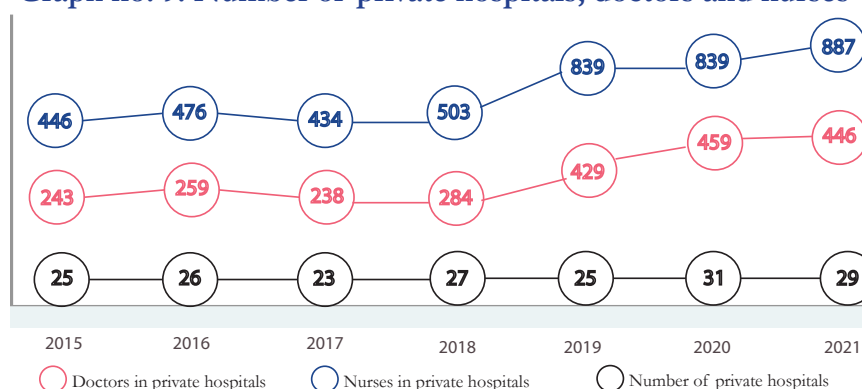
**Graph no. 8: Employees in public institutions**



Source: BPRG, based on KAS data for health, 2012-2021

On the other hand, the number of doctors and nurses in private hospitals has been increasing.

**Graph no. 9: Number of private hospitals, doctors and nurses**



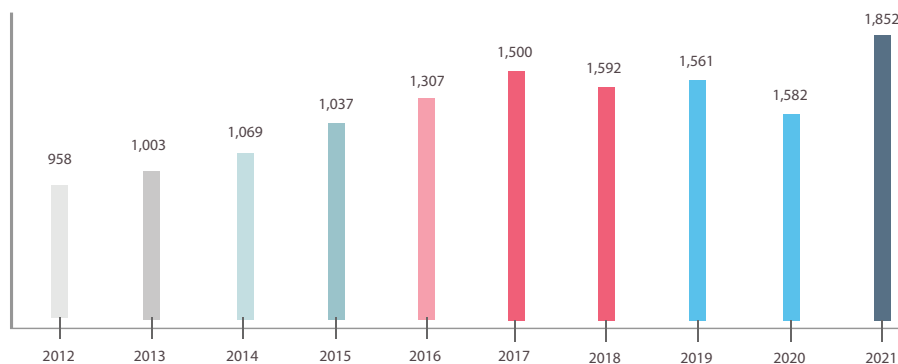
Source: BPRG, based on KAS data for health, 2015 - 2021

<sup>25</sup> Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Health Statistics 2018-2021, at <https://bit.ly/3DZ9kP2>

<sup>26</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, Law No.04/L-150 on Chambers of Healthcare Professionals, 2013, at <https://bit.ly/3SXx9el>

The total number of licenced private health institutions has also increased, almost doubling in the last decade.

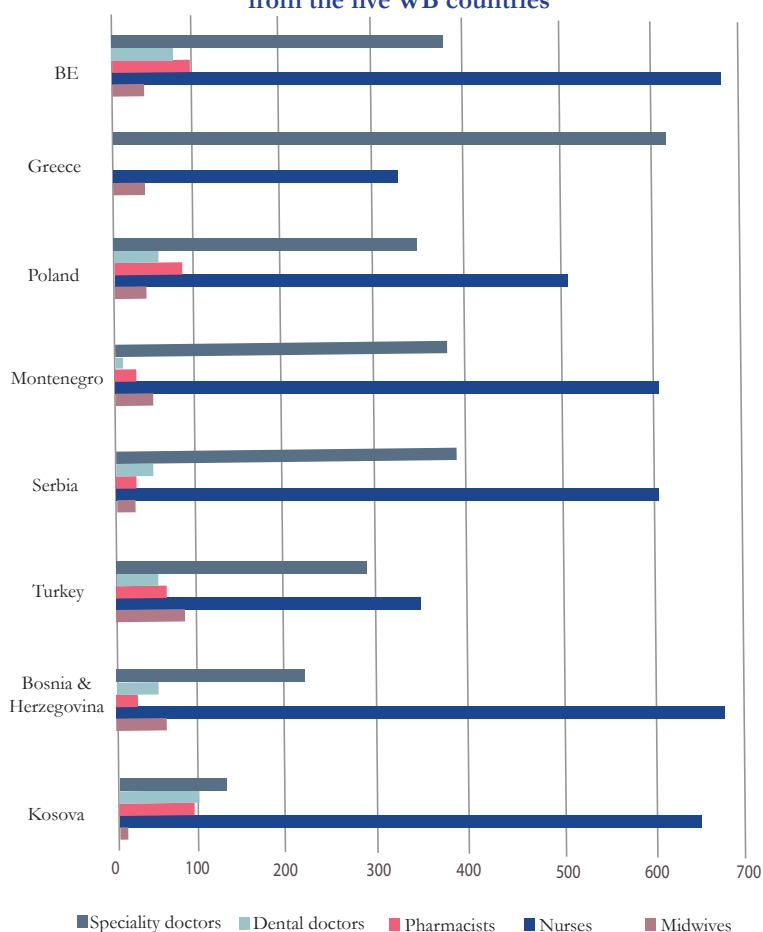
**Graph no. 10: Private licensed institutions, 2012-2021**



Source: BPRG, based on KAS data for health, 2012-2021

According to the data of the Kosovo Doctors Chamber, 28% of doctors are aged 24 to 34; 19% belong to the 35-44 age group; 19% of the 45-54 age group; 26% of the 55-64 age group and 8% over the age of 65.

**Table no. 2: Data on health workers and the rate of emigration from the five WB countries**



Source: Eurostat

At the beginning of October 2022, it was reported through a study that 200 doctors and 1,500 nurses are excessively employed in the public health sector.<sup>27</sup> However, Eurostat data put Kosovo last in Europe in terms of the number of specialty doctors per 100,000 inhabitants.

According to a 2019 report, existing capacities in the public hospitals in Kosovo are underutilised as patients do not trust the public sector, basic equipment is lacking, there are management problems, and all regional centres offer the same services, instead of specialising in certain services. This means that the present capacities of doctors and nurses are not utilised to their full capacity.<sup>28</sup>

Although Kosovo’s hospitals have 2.2 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, a much lower figure than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries’ average of 5.3 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, only 50% of hospital beds are used, a much lower estimate than the optimal standard of 85% utilisation that must be targeted. There are at least 24 wards in regional hospitals and tertiary care that treat fewer than 1,000 patients, the minimum number for efficient

treatment and management.<sup>29</sup> This happens because many patients from Kosovo seek healthcare services abroad or in private hospitals within the country. Only within nine months of 2018, 1,102 patients sought treatment abroad with the support of public institutions.<sup>30</sup>

Compared to the countries of the region and the EU average, Kosovo spends the least on health as a percentage

27 Koha.net and KTV, German expert’s study on health in Kosovo: 200 doctors and 1,500 nurses are excessively employed, 4 October 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3DZxOaB>

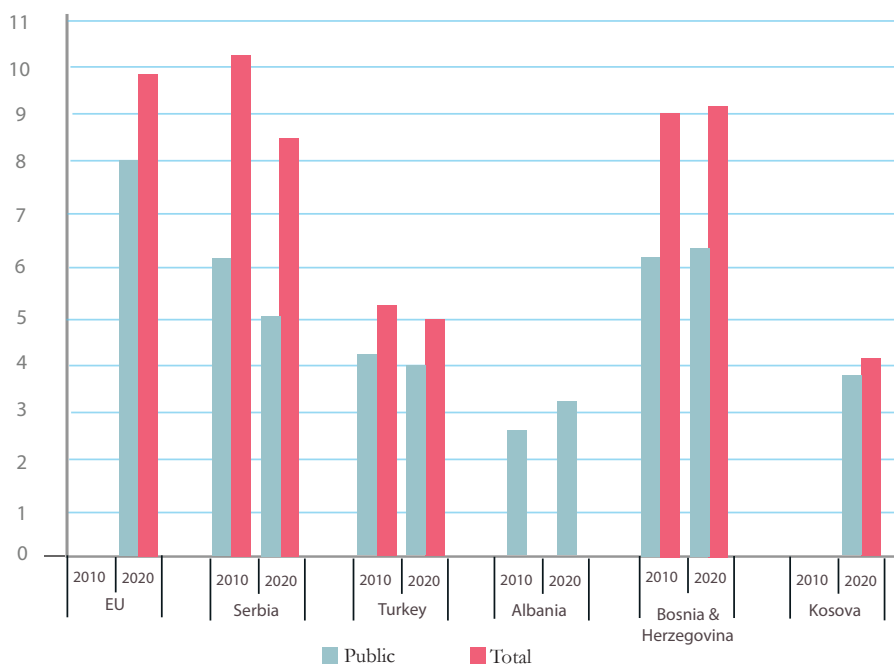
28 European Investment Bank - Technical Assistance, Upgrading the Physical Infrastructure of Secondary and Tertiary Healthcare Institutions: Feasibility Study, 17 April 2019.

29 Ibid.

30 bid.

**HEALTH SECTOR IN KOSOVO: The emigration of doctors and healthcare workers** of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), except for Albania, which spends even less. While Kosovo spends 4.4% on health services, the average in EU countries is 9.9%.

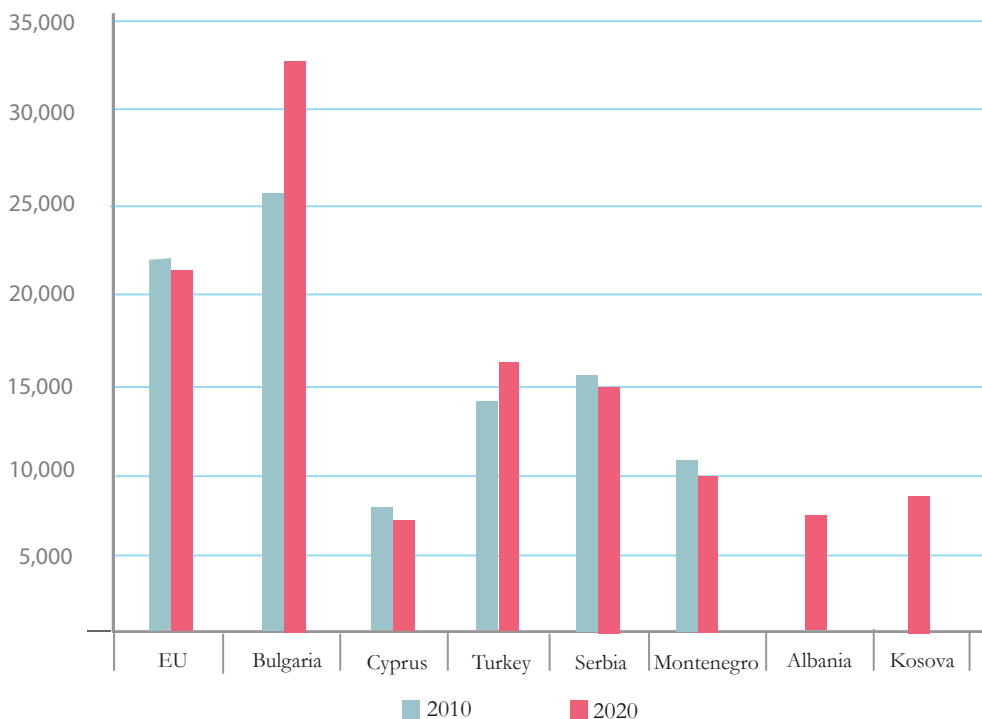
**Graph no. 13: Expenditures for health, as a % of GDP**



Source: Eurostat

Excluding Albania, Kosovo also has the lowest number of patient services per 100,000 inhabitants compared to other countries in the region and the EU average.

**Graph no. 14: Services (patients) per 100,000 inhabitants**



Source: Eurostat

Kosovo has a low number of doctors per capita and a part of the state budget is spent on training specialty doctors and subsidizing medical specialists. However, for many years in a row, a large number of specialist doctors and medical specialists fail to be employed in public institutions. In one of the plenary sessions of the Assembly of Kosovo held in 2016, the Minister of Health stated that, in some cases, medical specialists wait for work for



up to eight years. At that time, the Assembly allocated €325,000 to about 100 unemployed medical specialists, as a temporary solution. On the other hand, 764 medical specialists were unemployed or in the process of their specialization.<sup>31</sup>

According to the decision of the Assembly in 2016, public institutions must hire about 1000 speciality doctors and medical specialists, but this decision was never implemented. Data shows that the number of employees in public health institutions between 2016 and 2021 has decreased by about 1000. Medical specialists have continuously protested, demanding their engagement in public institutions (see graph no. 8).

At the beginning of October 2022, the Ministry of Health issued a public call to all unemployed general practitioners and medical specialists to be declared at the Ministry of Health between October 6 and 8. A total of 395 unemployed doctors were supposed to respond to this call, however, according to the Chamber of Physicians and the Health Trade Union Federation, only 100 of them have been declared. This shows that the majority of doctors who are unemployed in Kosovo may be in the process of being employed abroad, due to several factors, including the low level of salaries.

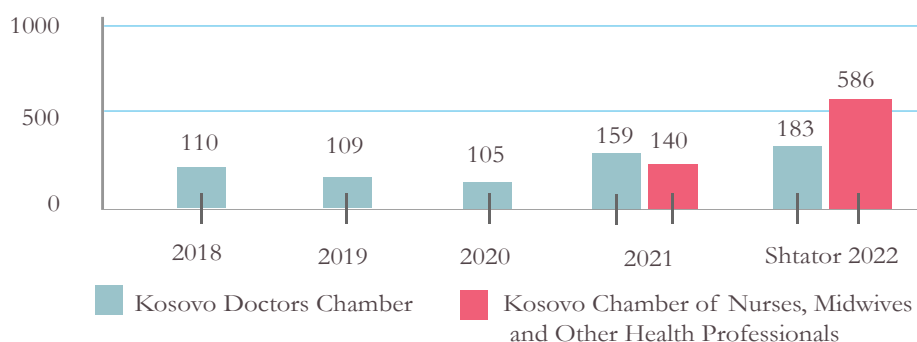
## EMIGRATION OF HEALTH WORKERS FROM KOSOVO

The emigration of health workers from Kosovo is an ongoing problem. Health workers from Kosovo emigrate for the same reasons as health workers from other countries, that being low salaries and the high demand for this profession in developed countries. According to the data of the Chamber of Doctors of Kosovo, the reasons most often mentioned by doctors who leave Kosovo are related to the lack of jobs (38% of respondents), low salaries (31%), working conditions (27%), additional reasons (4%).

According to a study, 14.43% of health workers surveyed have declared that they want to emigrate, while in Kosovo, 20.81% of the doctors have declared that they want to emigrate, including 12.81% of nurses and 13.59% of other healthcare workers.<sup>32</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has only increased the willingness of doctors to emigrate.

Every health worker who emigrates for work reasons must obtain a certificate of ethical and professional background, which is issued by the chamber of health professionals. According to the data of the Chamber of Doctors, from 2018 to September 2022, this chamber issued 666 such certificates. Likewise, according to the data of the Kosovo Chamber of Nurses, 726 certificates have been issued in the last two years.

**Graph no.12: Certificates of ethics and profession issued by the chambers**



Source: Kosovo Doctors Chamber and Kosovo Nurses Chamber

There is no exact data on how many health workers have left the country. Based on the data of the Federal Employment Agency of Germany for the years 2019-2020, 352 work permits were issued for health workers from Kosovo by employers in the health and social services sector in Germany, using the Regulation for the Western Balkans.<sup>33</sup> In general, in March 2019, there were 7,204 Kosovars employed in health services in Germany.<sup>34</sup>

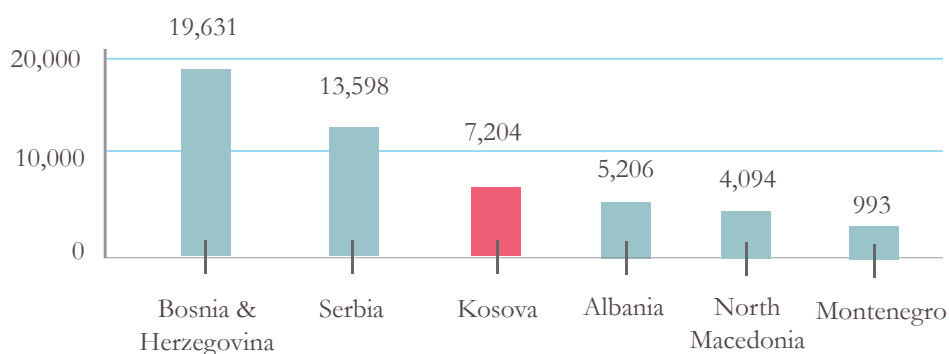
31 Statement of Imet Rrahmani, Minister of Health in the plenary session of 14 July 2016, at <https://bit.ly/3gMqAy9>

32 Nora Murataj & Co, Migration Intent of Health Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Kosovo, 5 September 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3EaITXX>

33 GAP Institute, How will the Covid-19 pandemic and Germany's new immigration cap affect Kosovo's labour migration? Prishtina, April 2021.

34 Deutsche Welle, Balkan caregiver recruitment akin to 'human trafficking', 14 January 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3E0dPIY>

Graph no. 15: health workers from WB in Germany



Source: Deutsche Welle

In addition to the Regulation for the Western Balkans, healthcare workers, as a category of skilled workers, can immigrate to Germany very easily under the German Skilled Workforce Migration Act, which came into force in March 2020.<sup>35</sup> There is the possibility of being equipped with the Blue Card at the EU level, to simplify and speed up the work permit procedures for the deficit categories, which also enables specialty doctors to be employed in any EU country, including the family members of the applicant.<sup>36</sup>

In July 2019, the Minister of Health of Kosovo and the Minister of Health of Germany signed a cooperation agreement whose purpose was also to facilitate employment for nurses from Kosovo in Germany. At the press conference on the occasion of the signing of the agreement, the Minister of Health of Germany stated that Germany needs about 70 thousand nurses, and this large number of nurses can only be provided by arrivals from other countries, and Kosovo is the first country with which such an agreement was signed with.<sup>37</sup> Later, a similar agreement would also be signed between Bosnia & Herzegovina and Germany. Unlike such agreements signed during the former Yugoslavia, the new agreements do not include any clause for the return of workers after their temporary work in Germany.<sup>38</sup>

The signing of the agreement between Germany and Kosovo is believed to have pushed many private institutions of higher education to open branches of nursing studies. While each year an average of 350 nursing students graduate from public institutions, at the same time about 4,000 graduate from private institutions.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, the Government of Kosovo has decided to remove the obligation for equipment with short-term work permits for health professionals from the diaspora, who at the request of the health institutions of Kosovo are temporarily engaged in these institutions. After licencing by the Ministry of Health, these health professionals can be engaged in the health institutions of Kosovo for a period of up to 90 days within each period of 180 days in a year. According to this decision, for longer engagements, they must start the procedure of obtaining a residence permit according to the legislation in force for foreigners. Additionally, the Administrative Instruction for the licencing of foreign health professionals has recently been approved. This Administrative Instruction regulates the procedure and conditions for obtaining a foreign healthcare professional's licence for the provision of healthcare. This instruction facilitates the engagement of foreign health professionals in the provision of services in our health system.

However, these measures are not enough. The departure of doctors and other health professionals is already beginning to have negative effects, but the biggest impact is expected to be felt in the next five years.<sup>40</sup> In the absence of doctors, most of the medical centres in the villages remain closed. Internal migration of health workers is an early phenomenon in Kosovo, where doctors are moving away from smaller villages and towns towards the main centres.

35 Marjan Icoski, Toward a New Youth Brain-drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans, German Marshall Fund, August 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3E1omDW>

36 European Union Blue Card, at <https://bit.ly/3zFuoHC>

37 Koha.net, The agreement to bring more Kosovar nurses to Germany is now official, 15 July 2019, at <https://bit.ly/2mmB4aS>

38 Marjan Icoski, Toward a New Youth Brain-drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans, German Marshall Fund, August 2022, at <https://bit.ly/3E1omDW>

39 GAP Institute, The emigration of Kosovo's labor force to Germany, February 2020.

40 Radio Free Europe, Departure of Kosovo Doctors damages the Kosovo health sector, 12 August 2021, at <https://bit.ly/3T4Q5HW>

Looking at the trend of population ageing, the number of elderly patients seeking treatment in public hospitals is expected to increase in the future. By 2040, it is predicted that the population over the age of 65 will increase by 238%. As the demand for medical services for young people will decrease, there will consequently be less demand for pediatric services and other services related to the new generations, but more demand for services in neurology, orthopedics, etc.<sup>41</sup>

## **THE ISSUE WITH DATA ON MIGRATION**

Seeing the growth of migration from countries outside the EU, in 2005 the European Commission asked the candidate countries to draw up an annual migration profile to collect data related to the labour market situation, the rate of unemployment, labour market demand and supply, professional needs in the country, migratory movements, financial inflows and outflows related to migration, including remittances.<sup>42</sup> For this purpose, in November 2013, the Government of Kosovo established the Governmental Authority for Migration (GAM), which functions as an inter-institutional mechanism that includes all relevant actors in the field of migration and is responsible for monitoring migratory movements. GAM publishes a regular annual report called “Migration Profile Light” which contains data regarding the latest migration trends.

However, neither the Kosovo Agency for Statistics (KAS) nor the GAM publishes data regarding the profile of those who emigrate. Although the Ministry of Health is one of the institutions that make up the GAM, it does not provide regular data regarding the emigration of health workers. The data can be easily obtained since the chambers keep data on the number of certificates issued to those health workers who seek to work abroad and this data is reported every three months to the Ministry of Health.

On the other hand, the capacities of KAS in the unit dealing with migration statistics are insufficient, while in general KAS needs 60 additional employees to perform its tasks.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The increased emigration of doctors and other health professionals necessitates the immediate attention and alertness of institutions. For many years, Remittances from the diaspora have long been one of the most important drivers of economic development in Kosovo, as well as the primary financier of consumption. In addition, the regular annual visits of immigrants bring millions of euros to Kosovo each year. However, in recent years, the large-scale departure of citizens abroad, particularly of the workforce, has begun to have visible economic and social consequences.

If Kosovo’s institutions do not take adequate measures, the emigration of health professionals will have even more consequences. The emigration trend is expected to accelerate in the coming years due to the high demand for health workers in EU countries and the significantly higher wages. The government should develop comprehensive policies based on detailed analysis of the factors that are pushing the emigration of doctors and other health workers. At the same time, institutions must make a real assessment of their needs and create the conditions for these professionals to continue working in the country.

Low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions require special institutional focus. These are among the primary causes of health-care worker emigration and, as such, necessitate immediate intervention in policies and strategies. The lack of necessary working conditions and insufficient technical capacities require an increase in general funding in this sector. Institutions must increase health spending to reach the EU average, and this increase in the budget must necessarily be accompanied by a rise in salaries for health workers.

To keep people from leaving the country, the government should provide jobs for those who finish their studies, whether locally or abroad. The current state of education also necessitates the improvement of standards and curricula in order to better meet the demands of the labor market.

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41 Ibid.

42 Governmental Authority for Migration, Extended migration profile 2013-2017, Prishtina, December 2018, at <https://bit.ly/3zEsgjk>

The measures taken so far by the institutions are not enough to manage the growing trend of emigration. The current situation could worsen within a short period, leaving the country with a severe shortage of human capacity in the healthcare sector. The loss of qualified professionals from such an important sector for the country's development, such as health, will produce harmful consequences for the country's economy and the quality of life of its citizens. As a result, institutions should work actively to develop policies and appropriate mechanisms for their implementation.

Kosovo institutions should take concrete steps to ensure efficient management of migration trends and to prevent workforce migration in the health sector, including:

- Increase the government's health budget as a percentage of GDP, bringing it closer to the EU average of 9.9%. The increased health budget should result in improved working conditions in public health institutions. The implementation of the Health Insurance Law provides an opportunity to increase healthcare funding.
- Increase healthcare worker salaries to be competitive with other European countries and more similar to those in European countries. The law on wages is viewed as a short-term solution, but even with the new coefficients provided by the current version of the law on wages, the wage level will remain more than 100% lower than that in EU countries.
- Scholarships for specialisation abroad should be offered, provided that the grantees return to serve and become employed in the country's public health system for a certain period of time.
- Immediate employment of general doctors should be applied after completing their studies. The recent graduates should assist speciality doctors and gain experience at the same time, which would contribute to the prevention of emigration. This is important since the largest number of those who emigrate are precisely those who graduate and cannot find a job immediately after graduation;
- Specialty doctors should be included in the regular salary system to improve services. This would ensure greater inclusion of medical specialists in the health system;
- The Governmental Authority for Migration should advance its data on the migration profile. Additionally, it should improve inter-institutional cooperation to increase opportunities for health workers and prevent emigration.

The Balkans Policy Research Group is an independent, regional think-tank based in Pristina, Kosovo. We provide timely policy analysis and recommendations on a wide array of state building issues; institutional and democratic consolidation; minority integration and good neighborly relations: European integration and policy change. We have decades of experience in policy reporting and development, strategic thinking and advocacy with governmental, international and non-governmental organizations.

Our rigorous, detailed, impartial reporting, always based on in-depth fieldwork, is the core of our work. We go beyond mainstream positions and seek to make change through creative, feasible, well-measured and forward-looking policy recommendations with the aim of helping develop strong, vibrant democracies, prosperous states and societies based on rule of law in the Western Balkans.

We engage in high-level advocacy, domestically, regionally and internationally, impacting policy discussions and options with regard to the home affairs and European policies toward the Western Balkans.

Balkans Group has developed other tools and platforms to achieve this change:

The **Policy Dialogue** promotes Kosovo's domestic dialogue, cohesion and reform-making agenda.

The **Policy Forum** (a Think-Tankers High-level Advocacy Forum) committed to enhancing the dialogue between the civil society and the institutions.

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