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Departure to the EU Member States:

causes and consequences of Kosovo's
recent migration





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October 2015

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Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

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October 2015

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Financial and Logistical Support: This publication was supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy within Professional Work Exchange for Enhanced Policy Dialogue Program, with the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom. Group 484 has provided logistical support of the research activities. All views expressed in this publication are only those of Kosovar Centre for Security Studies and author.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union's offer to extend the visa-free regime to the countries of the Western Balkans was one of the main political promises to them. This promise has been especially highlighted back in June 2003, in the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki, widely known as the Thessaloniki Agenda. The visa-free regime represented one of the main "carrots" in the pre-accession process by which the citizens of this region would directly sense the benefit of the European Union. Despite the major interest of the Western Balkans countries in benefiting from the visa-free regime, the European Union had a set of conditions that each country would need to fulfil in order to be granted visa-free access to the Schengen Area. Conditionality was mainly focused around the areas of rule of law, combating organised crime, corruption and illegal migration, and strengthening administrative capacity in border control as well as security of documents, among other things.¹

In January 2008, the European Commission invited the Western Balkan countries to start the visa liberalisation dialogue. This was still during the period when Kosovo had not declared its independence, which occurred around a month later on 17 February 2008, and accordingly Kosovo was not invited along with the other states to the visa liberalisation dialogue process.² Kosovo was not only left outside the process, but also the EU tightened the visa regime for Kosovo even further after

its decision to list Kosovo among third countries whose nationals shall be required to be in possession of a visa when crossing between the external borders of the Schengen Area Member States. Moreover, Kosovo was put on the black list due to "security concerns regarding in particular the potential for illegal migration"³ from Kosovo to the EU and Schengen Area Member States.

The position of Kosovo vis-à-vis the visa liberalisation process was further exacerbated by the stricter political stance of some of the European Union Member States that had not recognized Kosovo from the beginning. The official launch of the visa liberalisation process for Kosovo happened only around four years later, in 2012, when the European Commission introduced a visa liberalisation dialogue with Kosovo by handing over to the Kosovo Government a roadmap towards a visa-free regime for Kosovo.

This paper addresses the impact of the migration of Kosovo citizens on European Union Member States within the context of the visa liberalisation process. It presents the Kosovo authorities' progress, as measured by the European Commission, regarding the fulfilment of the conditions of visa liberalisation, and in particular the issue of migration. The foremost challenges for Kosovo remain the fight against organised crime and corruption, as well as the migration of unexpected numbers of Kosovo's citizens during 2014 and 2015. According to official statistical data, it is

1 (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 16).

2 (Merja, 2012, p. 4).

3 (European Commission, 2009, pp. 7-8).

estimated that around 75,000⁴ Kosovo citizens have migrated to the European Union, mainly to Hungary and Germany through Serbia, only from October 2014 to March 2015. As a result, during this period Kosovo ranked among the top five countries from where asylum applications were made in at least one of the European Union Member States. Irregular migration from Kosovo presents yet another challenge for Kosovo, since the European Union's stance is that the number of Kosovo asylum applications to the European Union needs to fall before any recommendation can be made in regards to the visa-free regime for Kosovo.

This paper attempts to provide reasons behind Kosovo's recent migration flow towards the European countries. Accordingly, our research indicates that there are three main reasons behind recent wave of migration from Kosovo: (1) lack of socio-economic perspective in Kosovo; (2) smuggling of migrants, and (3) the absence of cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of Kosovo and Serbia, that is to say between the Kosovo Police and the Police of Serbia on combating organized crime and smuggling of migrants as well. Apart from economic factors which are seen to be the main reasons for migration, a sharp surge in the number of migrants to the EU is considered to have occurred as a result of networks of smugglers operating in Kosovo and Serbia that were smuggling migrants in order to take them to the European Union through Serbian legal and illegal routes. Furthermore, there was no police

cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia to combat organized crime networks, which could prevent illegal migration.

2. MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EU VISA LIBERALISATION WITH KOSOVO

According to the European Commission, Kosovo has progressed in fulfilling the requirements set in the visa liberalisation roadmap, although further efforts are still required⁵ in order for them to join the visa-free regime of the European Union (EU). The roadmap for visa liberalisation is considered to be different in some aspects from the previous roadmaps designed for the other Western Balkan countries. As a matter of fact, Kosovo has to meet many more requirements than the other countries of the region. While the other Western Balkan countries have received a list of 40 to 50 conditions, Kosovo received a roadmap with around 100 conditions to be met in order to be considered for the visa-free regime with the EU.⁶ Furthermore, the European Commission in association with the Council of the EU and the EU Member States has the right, if necessary, to amend the roadmap,⁷ which means adding more conditions for Kosovo to meet.⁸ This is,

5 (European Commission, 2014a, p. 8).

6 (Garaiova & Merja, 2012, p. 17).

7 (European Union Office in Kosovo, 2012, p. 3).

8 (Garaiova & Merja, 2012, p. 19).

4 For more details, see the Eurostat reports for asylum applications in 2014 and 2015.

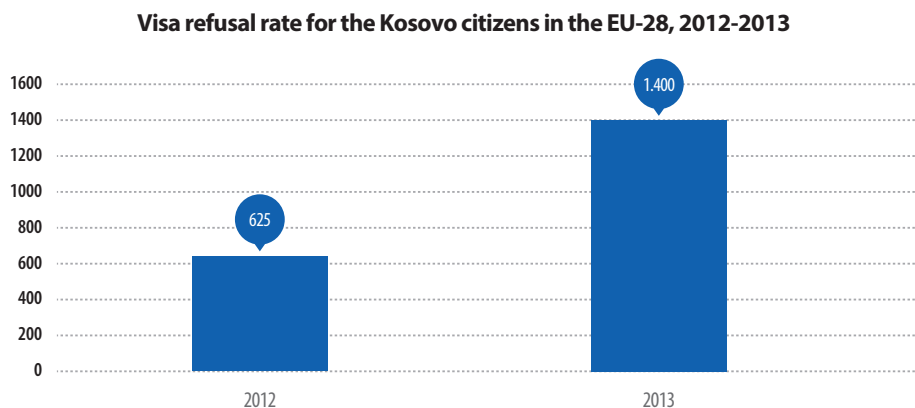


Figure 1 - Visa refusal rate for the Kosovo citizens in the EU 28 Member States for the years of 2012 and 2013¹¹

perhaps, also due to the experience of the EU with other Western Balkans countries which have fulfilled the criteria from the “ticking the box” perspective, without strict implementation of conditions on the ground. This has led senior officials of the Kosovo institutions to continuously state that the EU is applying “double standards”, in particular when it comes to the requirements of visa liberalisation for Kosovo.⁹ Regardless, the Kosovo authorities expect that there will be no further requirements put forth by the European Commission in regards to the existing visa liberalisation roadmap.

To date, the European Commission has issued two assessments identifying challenges that the Kosovo Government should address in order to progress towards the visa-free regime. Given its focus on migration issues, this paper will only review the European Commission’s assessment regarding the impacts of

migration on visa liberalisation with Kosovo. The main challenges that the European Commission provided in its assessments in this regard, remain: (1) the effective prevention and fight against organised crime and corruption; (2) the increased number of regular and irregular migrants; and (3) smuggling of human beings.¹⁰ The European Commission during 2012 and 2013 has observed that there was a substantial increase in the following indicators in regards to migration: 1) the visa refusal rate for Kosovo citizens in the Schengen Area, and more precisely refused entry to the EU Member States; 2) the increased rate of illegal migration of Kosovo citizens to the EU Member States; and 3) the rapid increase of the number of asylum applications submitted by Kosovo citizens to at least one of the EU Member States.

Statistical data indicates that the visa refusal rate for Kosovo citizens by embassies of the

9 Interview with Deputy Minister of the European Integration of Kosovo, Ramadan Ilazi, on 13 March 2015.

10 (European Commission, 2014b, p. 15).

11 (European Commission, 2014b, p. 18).

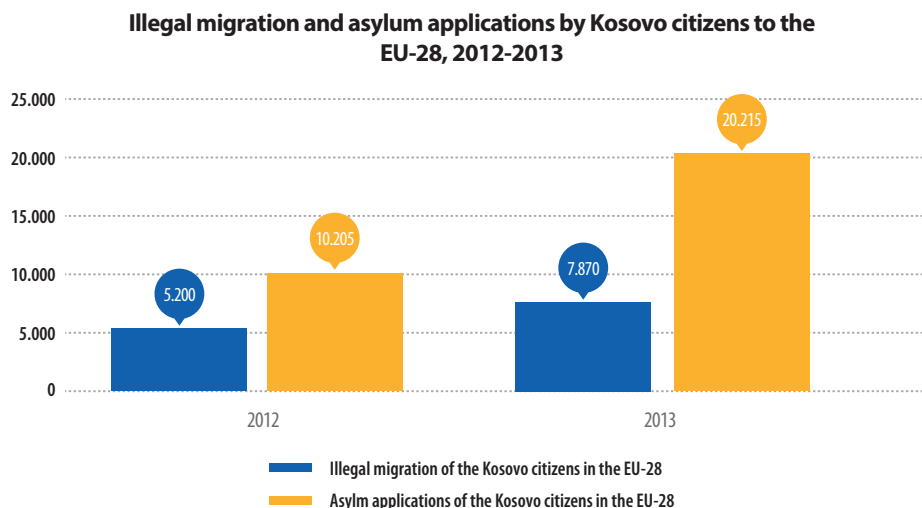


Figure 2 - Illegal migration and asylum applications by Kosovo citizens to the EU 28 Member States for the years of 2012 and 2013¹³

EU Member States in Kosovo increased from 625 in 2012, to 1,400 in 2013.¹² However, there is no official data for the subsequent period, 2014 and 2015 (first and second quarter of 2015), to tell whether the trend has continued to increase or decrease.

The increase in the rate of visa refusal was also followed by an increase in the number of illegal migrants and asylum seekers from Kosovo to the EU Member States. The number of Kosovo citizens found to be illegally staying in the EU between 2012 and 2013 increased by 51 percent, from 5,200 in 2012 to 7,870 in 2013, while Hungary was reported to be the destination of the biggest number of Kosovo's illegal migrants. Similarly to the illegal migrants, the number of official asylum seekers has increased during the same period. The

number of Kosovo citizens who sought asylum in the EU between 2012 and 2013 increased by 98 percent, from 10,205 in 2012 to 20,215 in 2013. Likewise, Hungary was the main destination where Kosovo citizens sought asylum during this period.

¹² (European Commission, 2014b, p. 18)

¹³ (European Commission, 2014b, pp. 19-20).

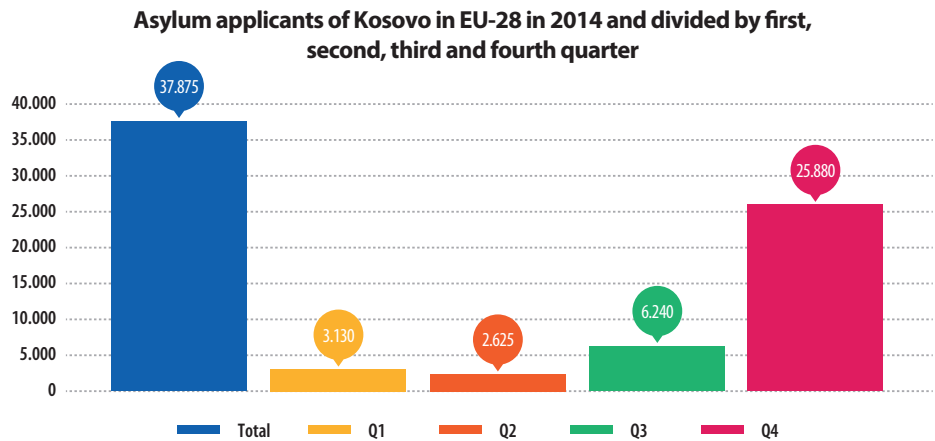


Figure 3 - Asylum applicants of Kosovo in the EU 28 Member States - in total of 12 months and divided by four quarterly periods for the year of 2014¹⁴

The number of asylum application continued to increase in the following year. The figure above shows the number of asylum seekers from Kosovo on quarterly basis for the year of 2014. The first half of 2014 did not show any major increase of the number of asylum seekers. However, beginning from the second half of 2014, the number of asylum seekers increased markedly. The number of asylum seekers increased in the third quarter of 2014, marking a major increase in the last quarter of 2014. According to Eurostat data, a total of 25,880 asylum seekers were registered during only the fourth quarter of 2014, which represents a higher number than the three previous three quarters combined.

In fact, the number of those who have sought asylum during the last quarter (October, November, and December) of 2014 represents around 68 percent of the asylum seekers for the entire year of 2014. The staggering number of asylum seekers from Kosovo during the last quarter of 2014 has ranked Kosovo as the third country of citizenship of asylum applicants in 2014 in the EU Member States, coming after Syria and Afghanistan.

¹⁴ (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 5). Q1 includes January, February and March; Q2 covers April, May and June; Q3 includes July, August and September; and Q4 or the fourth quarter covers last three months of 2014, namely October, November and December.

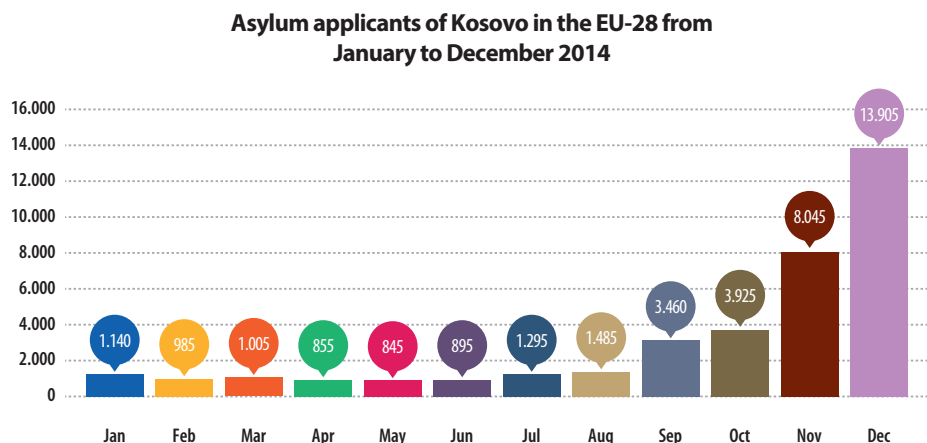


Figure 4 - Asylum applicants of Kosovo in the EU 28 Member States on a monthly basis from January to December 2014¹⁵

According to the figure above, it is clear that from January to August, the migration of Kosovo citizens to the European countries stayed at a rate of around +/- 1,000 asylum application for each month. September and October marked a radical change in

this trend, with approximately 8,000 asylum applicants registered in November, and more than 13,000 in December. Only in the last two months of 2014, more citizens applied for asylum than in the 10 previous months combined.

Table 1 - Asylum applicants of Kosovo by destination country in the EU 28 Member States - in total and in the fourth quarter for 2014

Country of destination	January-December 2014 ¹⁶	October-December 2014 ¹⁷
Hungary	21,455	17,880
Germany	8,920	4,750
France	2,735	800
Austria	1,905	1,350
Sweden	1,480	640
Other	1,380	460
Total	37,875	25,880

¹⁵ (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 5).

¹⁶ (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 9).

¹⁷ (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 19).

As the table above shows, Hungary and Germany stand out in the list of destination countries for Kosovo migrants registered as asylum applicants for the year of 2014. Out of total 37,875 asylum applicants, 21,455 of them were reported to have applied in Hungary and 8,920 in Germany. Similarly, only during the period from October to December of the same year, when the number of migrants from Kosovo began to increase rapidly, almost 18,000 of Kosovo's asylum applicants were registered in Hungary and almost 5,000 of them in Germany. The other European countries that Kosovo citizens chose to migrate to were France, Austria and Sweden, though they received a smaller number of asylum applicants compared to Hungary and Germany.

Eurostat's statistical data for 2015 indicate that migration of Kosovo citizens to the EU reached its peak in the first quarter of 2015. Among the EU countries, Hungary and Germany continued to receive the highest number of migrants during this period. According to these data, 48,875 citizens migrated to the EU Member States from January to March 2015. More precisely, out of the total number of migrants, 22,830 of them went to Hungary and 21,095 to Germany. The other countries of destination for migrants were Austria, France, Sweden, etc.

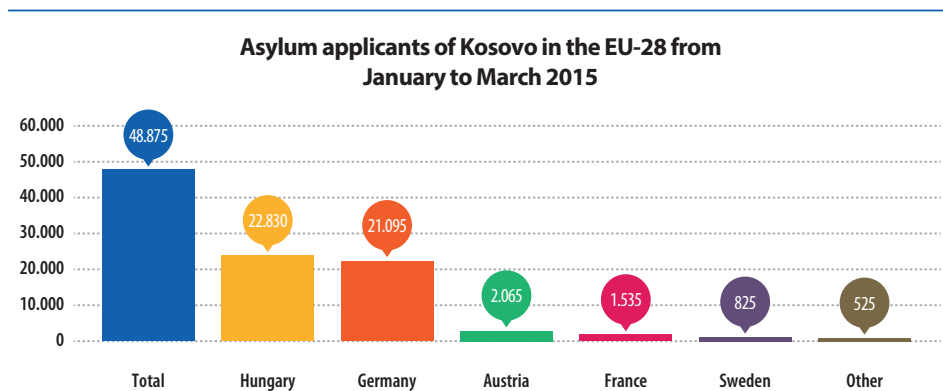


Figure 5 - Asylum applicants of Kosovo in the EU-28 by country of destination from January to March 2015¹⁸

¹⁸ (Eurostat, 2015b).

Table 2 – Kosovo's asylum applicants in the EU-28 from October 2014 to February 2015

Country of destination	October-December 2014 ¹⁹	January-March 2015 ²⁰	Overall sum from October 2014 to March 2015
Hungary	17,880	22,830	40,710
Germany	4,750	21,095	25,845
Austria	1,350	2,065	3,415
France	800	1,535	2,335
Sweden	640	825	1,465
Other	460	525	985
Total	25,880	48,875	74,755

According to the table above, a comparative analysis of the data for the last quarter of 2014 and the first quarter of 2015 show that asylum application rates continued to increase – despite the fact that the last quarter of 2014 marked the highest period of migration outflow from Kosovo to the EU countries, the first quarter of 2015 marked even a higher increase in asylum seekers. In fact, the number of asylum seekers registered in the first quarter of 2015 (48,875 asylum seekers)

was around 89 percent higher than the last quarter of 2014 (25,880 asylum seekers). Therefore, only for the period between October 2014 and March 2015, there were as many as 74,755 Kosovo migrants who sought asylum in one of the EU Member States. Given that this number represents those who have actually officially sought asylum, the total number of migrants who continue to reside illegally is much higher than 75,000, the figure for those who officially applied for asylum.²¹

The first ten countries ranked by number of citizens applying for asylum to the EU-28 from January to March 2015

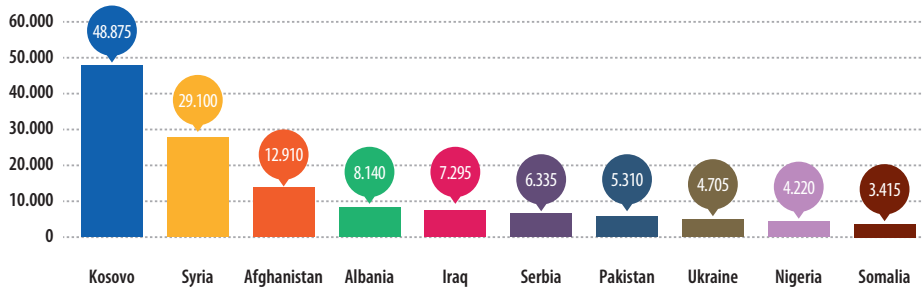


Figure 6 - The first ten countries ranked by number of citizens applying for asylum to the EU-28 from January to March 2015 (Q1 2015)²²

19 (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 19).

20 (Eurostat, 2015b).

21 (Möllers, Arapi-Gjini, Xhema, & Herzfeld, 2015, p. 1).

22 (Eurostat, 2015c).

Based on the figure above, during the first quarter of 2015 (January, February and March) migrants from Kosovo have been ranked first when it comes to asylum applications from its citizens to the EU Member States. With a total of 48,875 applications of asylum seekers, or 26 percent of the total number of first time applicants in the EU, Kosovo has seen the biggest number of migrants to the EU for the respective three-month period. It is followed by Syria (29,100 or 16 percent), Afghanistan (12,910 or 7 percent), Albania (8,140 or 4 percent), Iraq (7,295 or 4 percent), Serbia (6,335 or 3 percent), Pakistan (5,310 or 3 percent) and other countries.

A large number of migrants from Kosovo heading to the EU, even before the recent wave of major migration movements from Kosovo to the EU, have been constantly mentioned by the European Commission as one of the EU's main concerns with respect to visa liberalisation process with Kosovo. In its assessment, the European Commission pointed out that a substantial decrease in the number of migration and asylum seekers from Kosovo will be used as a positive indicative reference when it comes to the liberalisation of Kosovo's visa regime.²³ Senior officials of the EU stated that the number of asylum applications to the EU and the number of people irregularly staying in the Schengen Area need to fall before recommending visa-free regime for Kosovo.²⁴ At his visit to Kosovo in March 2015, the EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, demanded that the institutions in Kosovo show real results

in fighting corruption and organized crime, especially in high profile cases in Kosovo. He specified that in order to grant Kosovo the visa-free regime there should be "incredible measures" taken to prevent illegal migration of Kosovo citizens into EU Member States. However, he also brought a positive message to Kosovo by expressing his optimistic view that the Kosovo Government is walking the "last mile towards the visa-free status", and stated that Kosovo is not far away from the day when the EU should be in a position to announce the date when the liberalisation of visas shall take place.²⁵ Regardless of such rhetoric by some EU officials, the official stance of the EU is that there will not be any set deadline for when the visa-free regime for Kosovo will start. For instance, soon after Avramopoulos' statement, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, made it clear during his visit to Kosovo that without the fulfilment of "certain conditions" by the Kosovo institutions in respect of the visa liberalisation roadmap, Kosovo citizens will not travel freely within the EU.²⁶

On the other hand, senior representatives of Kosovo in charge of European integration have reiterated that Kosovo is taking into account recommendations of the EU in order to fulfil all the requirements

23 (European Commission, 2014b, p. 15).

24 (European Commission, 2015b).

25 Statement of the EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos in Prishtina is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSSt6Sa0wtns>. Retrieved on 14 March 2015.

26 Statement of the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn in Prishtina is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMjJt_GaxlI. Retrieved on 25 March 2015.

to get visa liberalisation. In June 2015, at the European Union Office in Kosovo/ European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, Kosovo's Minister of the European Integration submitted the report on the fulfilment of visa liberalisation requirements.²⁷ Apart from this, the Kosovo Government senior officials have admitted that illegal migration will have a negative impact during assessment of the European Commission concerning performance of requirements of the visa liberalisation process. Furthermore, the Ministry of European Integration does not expect that Kosovo will join the EU visa-free regime in 2015, taking into consideration the requirements that should be fulfilled as well as the lack of progress in the first three months of 2015 on this process.²⁸

3. CAUSES OF MIGRATION OF THE KOSOVO CITIZENS TO THE EU

Migration of Kosovo citizens to European countries is not a new phenomenon. Factors and motivations which have pushed citizens to migrate to European countries are distinctly economic. However, except for the dissatisfaction with economic and social circumstances, there are also other reasons for migration which are interrelated. This research paper lists the following as the main cause of migration of Kosovo citizens to European countries.

3.1. Lack of socio-economic perspective

The most fundamental reason for migration is the complaint of the Kosovo citizens with the current trend of socio-economic perspectives, and the overall level of welfare. Kosovo is facing high rates of unemployment, especially among the youth, and the percentage of people living below the poverty line is high. Based on the most recent data, out of the active labour force from 15 to 64 years of age, 35.3 percent were unemployed in 2014.²⁹ This problem is particularly pronounced among the youth, as it is estimated that 61.0 percent of Kosovo's youth are unemployed.³⁰ The situation is dire as well when it comes to the level of poverty. According to the 2013 statistical data, 29.7 percent of Kosovo citizens live below the poverty line,³¹ while 10.2 percent of Kosovo's population lives below the extreme poverty line.^{32 33}

Economic issues related to unemployment are one of the main concerns of Kosovo citizens. Recent opinion poll surveys in Kosovo show that a number of national security threats that Kosovo faces are economic in nature. According to such data, 77.4 percent of respondents believed that the high rate of unemployment is

29 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2015, p. 10).

30 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2015, p. 10).

31 According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics' definition, poverty line in 2011 was 1.72 Euro per adult equivalent per day (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2013, p. 3). There are no data regarding the consumption poverty in Kosovo for the subsequent years, namely 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015.

32 In 2011 extreme poverty line in Kosovo was 1.20 Euro per adult equivalent per day (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2013, p. 3).

33 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2013, pp. 3-4).

27 (Ministry of European Integration of Kosovo, 2015).

28 (Kqiku, 2015).

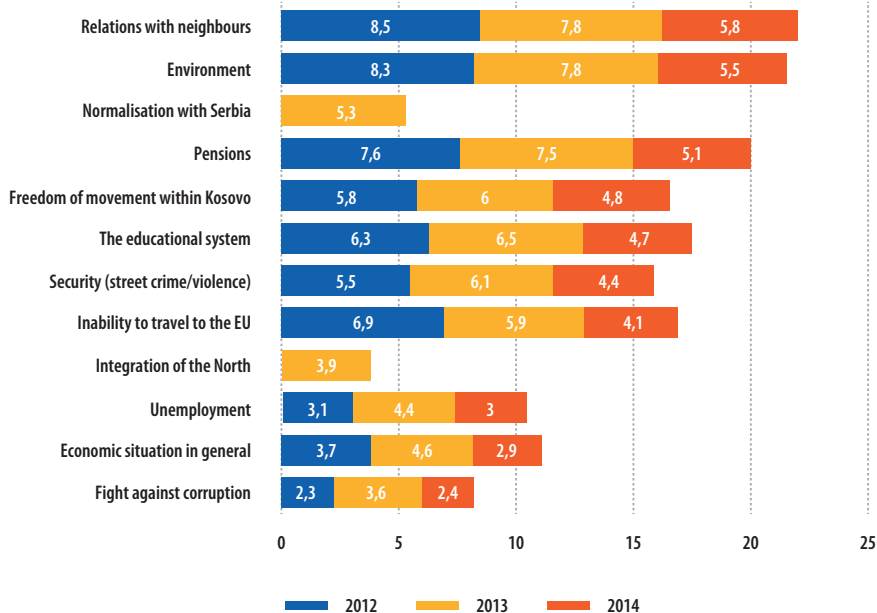


Figure 7 - What do you think are the most important issues facing Kosovo at the moment? 1 = Most important and 10 = Least important³⁵

the greatest threat to Kosovo.³⁴ Bearing in mind the high unemployment rate and the large number of people living below the poverty and extreme poverty lines, migration is viewed as an opportunity by Kosovo citizens to find a better social and economic situation abroad, particularly in the EU Member States. According to a 2014 public opinion survey, among many other concerns between 2012-2014 the three most significant issues for Kosovo citizens were, according to respondents' ranking: (1) the fight against corruption; (2) economic situation in general; and (3) unemployment in the country.

Asylum seekers from the recent wave of migration who were forced to return to Kosovo pointed out that the main reasons for migration were (1) unemployment, (2) poor socio-economic conditions, and (3) difficulties to find a job.³⁶ The recent migration wave is called a "human tragedy"³⁷ by the Kosovo Government officials who have admitted that this phenomenon was mainly caused by the lack of economic perspective in the country. However, Kosovo's Prime Minister surprisingly stated that citizens who were leaving the country for European destinations did not do so as a result of having poor conditions. Moreover, in relation to the massive waves of Kosovo's

34 (Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2014, p. 16).

35 (EU Perspective in Kosovo & UBO Consulting, 2014, p. 28).

36 Interview with F.R., a Kosovo's failed asylum seeker, on 12 March 2015.

37 Interview with Deputy Minister of the European Integration of Kosovo, Ramadan Ilazi, on 13 March 2015.

migration, he mentioned that migrants had good wages.³⁸ On the other hand, the EU officials, albeit indirectly, implicated the Kosovo institutions for migration by stating that the focus should be on the economic development of Kosovo, as people are trying to leave the country due to a lack of economic perspective.³⁹ Furthermore, the EU has clarified that asylum applications from Kosovo will be rejected as the EU asylum system exists only in order to help people fleeing persecution or serious harm in their own country and when they need international protection, but not for economic reasons.⁴⁰

However, EU officials have promised financial assistance to promote the economy of Kosovo by providing around 660 million EUR for the period from 2014 to 2020.⁴¹ In order to deal with the situation, in February 2015 the Kosovo Assembly adopted a Resolution on obstructing the illegal migration of Kosovo citizens. It has addressed a number of recommendations towards the Kosovo Government to undertake measures, especially in regards to economic development. It calls for the creation of a fund for obstructing illegal migration, greater commitment from the Government with a special emphasis on increasing the number of new jobs for Kosovo citizens, as well as the signing of agreements with the European countries

for seasonal employment for Kosovo citizens.⁴²

In addition, the idea of seasonal employment was as an alternative that was found for migration that was happening from Serbia as well. It entailed the process of concluding relevant international agreements between Serbia and the EU Member States which would allow temporary seasonal employment of citizens of Serbia, especially unskilled and low-skilled workers, according to the labour market needs of EU Member States.⁴³ This means of combating illegal migration from Kosovo was also positively seen by Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.⁴⁴

Therefore, problems of unemployment and the bad socio-economic situation in Serbia and Kosovo needs to be viewed as a regional problem, and it should be approached as such when it comes to finding a solution between the EU and the Western Balkans countries, in particular Kosovo.

38 For more details regarding stance of Kosovo's Prime Minister, Isa Mustafa on migration, see the following link at: <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/mustafa-nuk-kam-shkuar-te-stacioni-i-autobuseve-sepse-ata-qe-iknin-kishin-edhe-iphone-2-58794.html>. Retrieved on 27 February 2015.

39 (European Commission, 2015a).

40 (European Union Office in Kosovo, 2015).

41 (European Commission, 2015a).

42 (Assembly of Kosovo, 2015, pp. 1-2).

43 (Group 484 and Nexus, 2012, p. 64). Seasonal employment for Serbia's irregular migration was recommended by Group 484 in 2012. Based on the Eurostat statistics, Serbia in 2014 is ranked fifth for the number of asylum applications of its citizens in the EU countries (Eurostat, 2015a, p. 8). In addition, the trend of emigration of Serbian citizens to the EU Member States in order to seek asylum continued and measures that the Serbian government applied so far have not led to a substantive solution.

44 (Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, 2015).

3.2. Smuggling of migrants

The sharp surge in the number of migrants to the EU is considered to have occurred as a result of criminal networks of smugglers operating in Kosovo and Serbia, which were smuggling migrants to bring them to the EU via illegal Serbian routes. In terms of causality, this particular cause is interrelated with the previous cause: had the previous cause (economic) not existed to make people migrate in the first place, there would be a high chance that smugglers would not see their *raison d'être*. The itinerary of the recent Kosovo migrants to the EU countries was as follows: they took a bus from Kosovo (Prishtina, Ferizaj, Prizren, and other cities) to Belgrade, and afterwards they reached their next destination, which was Subotica - a Serbian city close to the border with Hungary. Indeed Kosovo citizens have been allowed to go to Serbia from Kosovo with their Kosovo-issued ID cards since the 2011 Brussels Agreement on the Freedom of Movement between Kosovo and Serbia was reached.⁴⁵ Given that Kosovo citizens need a visa to cross over to Hungary, as a Schengen Area state, the majority of Kosovo citizens who do not have a Schengen visa crossed the border between Serbia and Hungary illegally without a visa. This was a much cheaper means to migrate to an EU member state, compared to the legal way, i.e. paying for the visa and the flight tickets usually required by the consulates in Kosovo prior to applying for a visa. Therefore, the very visa regime that the EU has kept, and is keeping for Kosovo, has pushed Kosovo

citizens to find illegal ways to enter the respective EU and Schengen Area Member States.⁴⁶

In an interview for the purposes of this research, a Kosovo citizen who failed in his asylum application narrated his experience of crossing the Serbian-Hungarian border illegally through Subotica with the help of smugglers. Once he arrived in Subotica's bus station from Belgrade, he and other Kosovo citizens were stopped by the Police of Serbia and were asked to show their ID cards. According to him, they had to pay 150 Euros to the police officers in Serbia in order to get back their ID cards. It should be noted that according to the interviewee, the Serbian Police was well aware of their intention to move from Subotica to Hungary illegally, but besides asking for money, they did not do anything to stop them from crossing illegally to Hungary.⁴⁷ From there he took a cab, which left him at "Villa Lira" in Subotica and put him in contact with smugglers at the Villa. He said that he had to pay 300 Euros to some smugglers with the aim to cross the border with Hungary from Serbia. After having agreed with the smugglers, they took him to the Serbian side of border, and claimed to not have been checked or controlled by either the Serbian or Hungarian border police officers. This narrative is one of many from those who have returned, and show how easy it was to cross the border between Serbia and Hungary illegally.

⁴⁵ Brussels Agreement on the Freedom of Movement is available at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/agreement_0210_freedom.pdf. Retrieved on 27 March 2015.

⁴⁶ Interview with Deputy Minister of the European Integration of Kosovo, Ramadan Ilazi, on 13 March 2015.

⁴⁷ Interview with F.R., a Kosovo's failed asylum seeker, on 12 March 2015.

With respect to the fight against organized crime and smuggling of migrants, the Kosovo Police arrested 98 persons in 2014 on charges for the smuggling of migrants.⁴⁸ In March 2015, the Kosovo Police undertook a coordinated police action with seven other European countries – namely: France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Switzerland as well as with support of EUROPOL and EUROJUST, and arrested 78 persons in those countries under grounded suspicions of smuggling migrants, counterfeiting documents, and other organized crime activities. It is important to note that the arrested group of organized criminals was smuggling migrants by using routes from Kosovo and Serbia towards Hungary with the purpose of bringing migrants into the other European countries.⁴⁹

3.3. Absence of cooperation between the Kosovo Police and the Police of Serbia

Illegal migration of the Kosovo citizens through Serbia and the smuggling of migrants through Serbia have exposed the lack of cooperation between the law enforcement institutions of both countries. However, this research has found that the cooperation of these institutions, in particular of the Kosovo Police with the Police of Serbia, was lacking, especially during the critical period of illegal migration (October 2014 – March 2015), in preventing illegal migration and fighting networks of smugglers. The police services of both countries do not formally

cooperation in general due to existing political disagreements between Kosovo and Serbia, which, on the other hand, impedes combating organized crime, including smuggling of migrants. Police cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia is conducted through the international presence in Kosovo, namely UNMIK and EULEX. It is worth mentioning that Kosovo has reached international agreements on police cooperation with its neighbouring countries, except with Serbia.⁵⁰

With respect to illegal migration, the Kosovo Police confirmed that “there was no cooperation among the Kosovo Police with the Police of Serbia”.⁵¹ This is further confirmed by senior officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo who pointed out that despite efforts of the Kosovo Police to cooperate with the Police of Serbia, the latter did not show any will to cooperate, especially in fighting human trafficking, smuggling of migrants as well as prevention of illegal migration.⁵² Based on them, the fact that Serbia did not react is an indicator that its authorities unwittingly facilitated illegal migration of the Kosovo citizens from Serbia to Hungary. On the other hand, Serbian institutions, in particular the Ministry of the Interior and the Police of Serbia did not provide information for this research regarding the issue of non-cooperation with the Kosovo Police in the

48 Data are provided by the Kosovo Police.

49 (Kosovo Police, 2015a).

50 (Kursani, 2015, pp. 4-7).

51 A written reply (through e-mail) by the Kosovo Police Press and Public Relations Office to KCSS, on 12 March 2015.

52 Interview with Director of Directorate of Citizenship, Asylum and Migration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo, Valon Krasniqi, on 11 March 2015.

prevention of illegal migration and the fight against networks of smugglers.

However, video material leaked on the internet and Kosovo's media demonstrates that some of the migrants were transported from Subotica towards Hungary by the Police of Serbia.⁵³ Furthermore, there were published pictures by the media which show how the migrants passed the Hungarian side of the border: basically, they were not asked by the respective authorities at the border of Hungary if the Kosovo migrants were in the possession of a Schengen visa to cross the border of Hungary.⁵⁴

Therefore, the lack of police cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia, especially during the latest wave of migration, and the lack of preventive mechanisms did influence, if not facilitate, the migration wave from Kosovo. However, this primarily relates to the first cause mentioned earlier in the paper. As a result, in the first half of February 2015, Germany sent 20 police officers to the border between Hungary and Serbia. The aim was to stem illegal migration and to control a surge in the number of Kosovo's asylum seekers going into the EU, and especially Germany.⁵⁵ Soon after the German intervention, Serbia and Hungary started to control the border more strictly, and as a result, arrested a

number of migrants. This meant that as Serbia and Hungary began reacting more seriously only when they had the pressure from Germany to do so.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the number of the Kosovo citizens seeking asylum in the EU Member States began to decrease significantly, compared with previous periods. Also, in March 2015, Kosovo's and Serbia's law enforcement institutions commenced their cooperation. The General Director of the Kosovo Police accompanied by senior officials of the EULEX held a meeting in Belgrade with his counterpart from the Police of Serbia.⁵⁷ They discussed the possibilities of cooperation on preventing and combating organized trans-border crime, enhancing border control, and preventing illegal migration. Regardless of this first meeting being held between the heads of the police services of both countries, it did not result in any potential further cooperation in the future.

53 For more details, see the following video material at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5FDAvYVHxQ>. Retrieved on 27 March 2015.

54 Pictures are available at: <http://www.zeri.info/aktuale/18309/kosovaret-e-kalojne-kufirin-parasyve-te-policise-hungareze-foto/>. Retrieved on 27 March 2015.

55 (Chambers, 2015).

56 Interview with Director of Directorate of Citizenship, Asylum and Migration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo, Valon Krasniqi, on 11 March 2015.

57 (Kosovo Police, 2015b).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Kosovo needs to open a dialogue with the EU Member States in order to try to define international agreements that will allow and regulate seasonal employment of the Kosovo citizens in the EU, all in accordance with the needs of the EU labour market.
- Kosovo should continue to work on national economic reforms and use other measures that are defined in relevant regulations, in order to reduce unemployment and improve job creation.
- Law enforcement/security institutions of Kosovo and Serbia, namely the police services of both countries, as a starting point, should have more frequent meetings which should lead to tangible cooperation. Both countries should share information regarding the prevention of illegal migration as well as jointly combating networks of organized crime and smuggling of migrants.
- Kosovo and its institutions, including those at local and national levels, should fulfil the criteria set forth in the visa liberalisation roadmap and prepare the country to get the visa-free regime in the EU's Schengen Area. On the other hand, the EU should be clear about its assessment of Kosovo's progress towards visa liberalisation without the principle of moving targets. Furthermore, Kosovo should be treated in the same way as the other five Western Balkan countries with respect to EU integration and the visa liberalisation process, especially by the EU itself.
- The EU's planned investments in Kosovo, besides the rule of law, should target the production and industrial sectors, which produce jobs based on Kosovo's existing labour structural parameters, and most importantly education, which, in the long run, should create a more qualified supply of jobs for both Kosovo and the EU (seasonal job openings).

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Katalogimi në botim – **(CIP)**

Biblioteka Kombëtare e Kosovës "Pjetër Bogdani"

314.74

327(4/9:496.51)

Avdiu, Plator

Departure to the EU Member States: causes and consequences of Kosovo's recent migration / Plator Avdiu. – Prishtina : Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2015. - 27 f. : ilustr. me ngjyra ; 28 cm.

Bibliography : f. 22-26

ISBN 978-9951-679-24-4

ISBN 978-9951-679-24-4



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