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WESTERN BALKANS

POLICY MEMO: KOSOVO SHOULD BECOME AN OBSERVER MEMBER IN THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK (EMN)

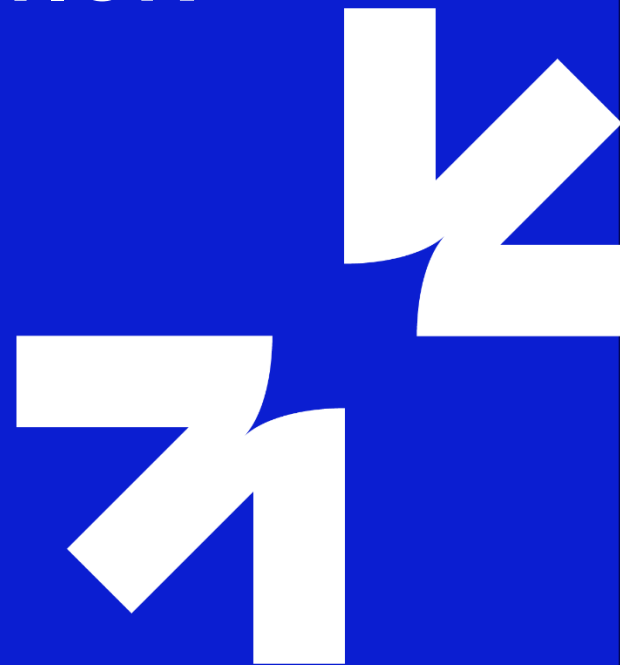
BY FISNIK REXHEPI AND RAMADAN ILAZI

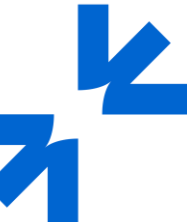
March 12, 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bringing the European Union and the Western Balkans closer through operational integration is a practical way to boost cooperation and help the region get ready for future EU membership. Instead of focusing solely on the lengthy and complex enlargement process, operational integration encourages Western Balkan countries to join EU policy frameworks, expert groups, and technical cooperation efforts. Migration governance represents one of the most promising areas for such integration. The European Migration Network (EMN), the EU's primary knowledge and analysis platform





on migration and asylum policies, offers a structured framework for evidence-based policy exchange among EU Member States and selected observer countries.

This memo recommends that Kosovo join the European Migration Network as an observer. This would be a practical move toward closer integration with the EU. By joining the EMN, Kosovo could build stronger institutions for evidence-based policymaking, share information with EU Member States, and improve regional cooperation on migration issues.

Kosovo has already developed institutional mechanisms that could support participation in the EMN, particularly the Government Authority on Migration (GAM), an inter-institutional coordination platform responsible for migration policy analysis and monitoring. Recent reforms have strengthened Kosovo's migration governance framework, including improved data coordination and inter-institutional cooperation. At the same time, Kosovo has demonstrated its capacity to contribute to European migration policy dialogue. A recent example is the development of Kosovo's migration contingency planning framework, based on methodologies developed by the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and Frontex, and subsequently shared with regional partners by Kosovo experts.

Giving Kosovo observer status in the EMN would benefit both Kosovo and the EU. For Kosovo, it would help align its policies with EU standards and get its institutions ready for future membership. For the EU, it would improve understanding of the region and strengthen cooperation with a key partner in migration management.

Some legal and political issues regarding Kosovo's status may require attention, but examples in EU networks show that practical solutions can be found. Creating a clear path for Kosovo to become an EMN observer would be a realistic and achievable step toward closer integration.

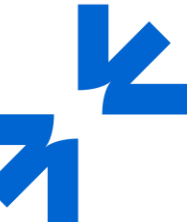
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THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK

The European Migration Network (EMN) is the main EU platform for sharing and developing information and analysis about migration and asylum policies.

The network was set up by Council Decision 2008/381/EC and later strengthened by Regulation (EU) No 516/2014, which outlines its mandate and how it operates. The





European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) coordinates the EMN.

The EMN's main goal is to offer clear, reliable, and comparable information about migration and asylum policies in Europe to help support evidence-based policymaking. The network works through National Contact Points (NCPs) in each participating country. These NCPs are usually based in ministries of interior, migration agencies, research groups, or international organisations focused on migration. The EMN currently includes the following members: **EU Member States** (except Denmark) while **observer countries** include Norway, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania.¹

Each National Contact Point leads a national network of stakeholders, bringing together government bodies, universities, research groups, and civil society experts in migration and asylum. The EMN produces a range of policy-relevant materials, including updates on immigration and asylum developments, comparative studies on specific themes, country factsheets, quick policy briefs (called "EMN Informs"), and ad-hoc queries responding to urgent policy needs

The EMN also supports expert collaboration by organising workshops, conferences, and platforms for knowledge sharing. A key part of the EMN's work is the Return Expert Group (REG), which encourages practical cooperation and sharing of best practices on return policies. By facilitating structured information exchange and policy comparison, the EMN plays an important role in supporting EU migration governance.

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RATIONALE

If Kosovo joins the EMN, both Kosovo and the European Union would gain important benefits.

1. **Joining the EMN would help Kosovo strengthen its evidence-based policymaking.** Kosovo could use EMN studies, policy analyses, and information-sharing tools to

¹ Read more at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-member-and-observer-countries_en



design migration policies that meet EU standards. Membership would also help Kosovo track migration trends and see how effective its policies are.

- 2. Joining the EMN would support Kosovo's EU integration process.** Migration governance is a key part of the EU acquis under the Justice and Home Affairs chapter. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo, especially Articles 80–83 on migration, asylum, and border management, and Article 96 on statistics, calls for closer cooperation and alignment of Kosovo's policies and practices with the EU. By joining the EMN as an observer, Kosovo would take a practical step toward meeting these commitments. EMN membership would give Kosovo access to EU analysis, policy comparisons, and standard methods for migration data. This would help Kosovo align its migration governance with EU standards, improve policymaking, and work more closely with EU Member States as it prepares for future accession talks.
- 3. Joining the EMN would also help Kosovo improve regional migration cooperation.** Migration flows in the Western Balkans are closely linked, so managing them well depends on strong regional partnerships. Most Western Balkan countries already take part in the EMN as observers, except for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. If Kosovo joins, it would help share information across the region and give a clearer picture of migration trends.
- 4. From the EU's point of view, Kosovo joining the EMN would help the EU better understand** migration developments in the Western Balkans. Kosovo is already an important partner in managing migration in the region, especially when it comes to migration routes, labour mobility, and return policies.

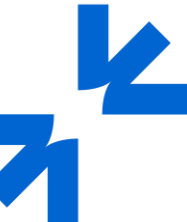
Joining the EMN would build on the cooperation Kosovo already has with EU agencies such as **Frontex** and the **European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)**.

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KOSOVO'S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE EMN

In the past few years, Kosovo has made significant progress in managing migration. A key part of this system is the **Government Authority on Migration (GAM)**, which brings together different institutions to develop and monitor migration policies. The GAM





became stronger after a government decision in September 2022, which expanded its membership to about **twenty public institutions** involved in migration management.

Today, the GAM helps different institutions work together and supports policy decisions based on data and evidence. The GAM operates through several levels of organisation, including a strategic decision-making level, a Secretariat that manages coordination and analysis, and six working groups focused on important migration topics. These working groups cover: regular migration and labor mobility, irregular migration, internal migration, reintegration of repatriated persons and integration of foreigners, communication and public awareness, migration data and statistics. These groups help the GAM produce reports, yearly migration profiles, policy suggestions, and data-based assessments of migration trends.

The European Commission's 2025 Report on Kosovo recognised progress in migration governance, particularly in strengthening institutional coordination and increasing the use of data in policymaking. Regarding the institutional framework, the report highlights that the Government Authority on Migration (GAM) continues to serve as the main advisory and coordination body in the field of migration. Within GAM, an early warning mechanism has been established to monitor migration trends following the entry into force of the visa-free regime with the European Union. At the same time, institutions have continued to strengthen their capacity to manage migration through increased budget allocations, targeted training programmes, and improved inter-institutional coordination.

Because of its analytical role and broad membership, the Government Authority on Migration could act as Kosovo's National Contact Point for the EMN. It could coordinate national stakeholders and contribute to the network's reports and analysis.

KOSOVO'S ROLE IN EUROPEAN MIGRATION COOPERATION

Kosovo has already shown that it can take part in European migration policy cooperation.

One example is Kosovo's Contingency Plan for managing a possible influx of migrants and refugees. This plan was prepared using the latest methods developed by FRONTEX and the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA). Kosovo was the first country in the Western Balkans to develop such a contingency planning framework using this updated methodology.





Following the completion of the plan, Kosovo experts were invited by Frontex and EUAA to share their experience with regional partners. This experience was subsequently shared with colleagues in Albania, supporting the development of similar contingency planning frameworks in the region.

This example illustrates the type of expert-level cooperation and knowledge exchange that the EMN seeks to facilitate. Kosovo's experience demonstrates that the country can both benefit from and contribute to such cooperation platforms. Joining the EMN would strengthen Kosovo's cooperation with EU institutions and agencies, and allow the country to take a more active role in European migration policy discussions.

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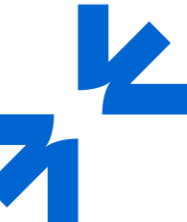
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the past few years, Kosovo has made significant progress in managing migration. A key part of this system is the **Government Authority on Migration (GAM)**, which brings together different institutions to develop and monitor migration policies. The GAM became stronger after a government decision in September 2022, which expanded its membership to about **twenty public institutions** involved in migration management.

While Kosovo would benefit from joining the EMN, some legal and political issues could make this step challenging.

- ✓ **Status-related considerations.** Kosovo's participation in EU mechanisms sometimes faces political challenges because five EU Member States have not recognised Kosovo's independence. In certain EU institutional frameworks, this issue may complicate decisions requiring unanimous agreement among Member States. However, there are examples where Kosovo takes part in EU programs and international platforms using **status-neutral arrangements**. The same approach could work for joining the EMN.
- ✓ **Institutional designation:** To join the EMN, Kosovo must designate a National Contact Point to coordinate stakeholders and participate in EMN activities. Kosovo should officially designate this institution and ensure it has sufficient resources. The Government Authority on Migration is a strong candidate for this role.



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- ✓ **Data governance and reporting standards.** To join the EMN, Kosovo must comply with EU data reporting standards and be able to share comparable analyses. Kosovo has already improved its migration data systems, but more work may be needed to fully meet EMN requirements.
 - ✓ **Financial and administrative arrangements.** EMN National Contact Points receive funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and national contributions. For Kosovo to join, it would need to set up the right financial and administrative arrangements with the European Commission. To help Kosovo become more involved in EU migration governance, these steps are recommended:
 - ✓ **Initiate dialogue with the European Commission on EMN observer participation.** Kosovo's institutions should work with the EU Office in Prishtina and DG HOME to find out what steps are needed for observer participation in the EMN.
 - ✓ **Designate the Government Authority on Migration as the national coordination mechanism.** The GAM should be formally designed. The Government Authority on Migration should be officially named as the main institution to coordinate Kosovo's participation in EMN activities. Governance **systems.** Kosovo should continue improving its migration data collection and analysis to align with the EU reporting standards used by the EMN.
 - ✓ **Promote regional support for Kosovo's participation.** Western Balkan countries that are already part of the EMN could help support Kosovo's inclusion as part of wider regional cooperation.
 - ✓ **Explore participation models.** The EU and Kosovo should look at flexible ways for Kosovo to join the EMN without needing to change current legal frameworks.

Operational integration is a practical way to strengthen cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans and to help candidate countries get ready for future EU membership. If Kosovo joins the European Migration Network as an observer, it would be a clear and realistic step forward. This would help Kosovo make better migration policies, improve regional cooperation, and align more closely with EU migration rules. At the same time, the EU would gain better analysis and cooperation tools in an important region. By supporting Kosovo as an observer in the EMN, the EU would make a practical move toward closer ties with the Western Balkans and improve Europe's ability to manage migration together.

