

Visa liberalisation and labour migration: Legal and economic implications for Kosovo

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Abstract. Throughout the years of Kosovo's independence, the country has formed certain relations with neighbouring states and with Western Europe, but the significant simplification of the border crossing procedure with the Schengen area, which came into force on 1 January 2024, requires a review of the existing balances and the formation of up-to-date assessments of possible consequences. The study aims to predict the further development of Kosovo-EU relations in the context of migration processes. Statistical and retrospective analysis methods were used to study the key economic indicators of previous years regarding the prospects for the redistribution of labour resources. The study proves the positive development of the Kosovo economy by analysing such important economic indicators for previous years as gross domestic product, unemployment rate, net migration from Kosovo, average wages in the country, and the volume of remittances received by the economy from labour migrants working abroad. A dedicated study was conducted on Kosovo's relations with its neighbouring countries – Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In the context of labour migration processes, the experience of Kosovars working in these countries was assessed, and changes in labour market balances caused by visa liberalisation were predicted. Based on the data obtained and the conclusions drawn, a forecast was made regarding the economic and political consequences of visa-free travel for Kosovars: the prospect of working in the Schengen area will be used by those citizens of the Republic of Kosovo who are already working abroad, and there will be no significant outflow of the labour resources available in the country. The practical significance of the study lies in the modelling of further development of the labour market in Kosovo, which will be useful for managers of state-owned enterprises and large private employers in formulating their HR strategies

Keywords: European integration; labour market; labour shortage; repatriation; dynamic development

Introduction

Since 2015, Kosovo has been on a steady path of sustainable economic growth: incomes have increased by 50%, while poverty has fallen by 35% to historic lows, according to the World Bank (2023c). The country has finally moved away from a subsidy model and dependence on foreign aid tranches, thanks to steady consumption growth, investment in technology projects, and an increase in human capital, thanks to the help of the diaspora and the return of migrant workers.

One of the markers of the Republic of Kosovo's correct development on the European path was the adoption in January 2023 by the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs (LIBE) of a visa liberalisation for the country's citizens. According to this de-

cision, from the beginning of 2024, Kosovars will be able to cross the Schengen area without any additional permits under the European system of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), which digitally processes data on those travelling to the EU. Such a step by the EU demonstrates the growing trust in the republic's citizens and significantly strengthens Kosovo's integration into the European community. However, despite the strong pace of economic development in Kosovo, the existing reforms are not enough, and the state must continue to increase its productivity, which has been repeatedly highlighted by the national academic community. The challenges faced by the labour market in Kosovo were highlighted by A. Haziri and

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B. Shala (2021) and A. Loku *et al.* (2021). Given the unbalanced fiscal system, the unemployment rate in the country remains high, as evidenced by the number of applications for work visas from Kosovars in Croatia and Germany. The demand for labour within the country remains quite low, and to remedy this situation, the authors believe that fundamental reforms are needed, such as simplifying the procedure for writing off corporate debts, changing the value-added tax (VAT) rate, raising the minimum wage, additional duties on the import of cheap Serbian products.

Tourism is an important area of economic development in Kosovo. Several Orthodox monasteries of the Patriarchate of Peć, which are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, can become the object of a real tourist boom with sufficient informational and infrastructural support from the state. I. Kovaçi *et al.* (2021) studied the tourist region of the Albanian Alps, showed the predominance of small and medium-sized tour operators, and proved the need to develop a state sectoral strategy that would ensure a variety of services for travellers and the creation of entire ethnic-style tourist clusters. The impact of public investment on economic growth and development was studied by F. Miftari *et al.* (2021). After analysing the impact of disaggregated public expenditures, transfers, and subsidies on the development of the Republic of Kosovo, the authors proved that these financial processes have a strong positive correlation with gross domestic product (GDP), while capital investment expenditures show a much smaller relationship with it. Accordingly, using regression analysis, the authors concluded that public investment projects do not significantly affect economic growth in the republic.

F. Sahiti (2021), conducting a comparative analysis of the economies of Kosovo and other countries, examined the impact of political and macroeconomic institutions, human capital, and access to finance on the activities of private enterprises. The results of the study showed that, compared to the reference countries, entrepreneurship in Kosovo faces numerous constraints, which means that for further full-fledged business development, it is necessary to use European experience and accelerate further economic liberalisation. Referring to the sensitive topic of labour migration in the Republic of Kosovo, it is worth mentioning the study by L. Hajdari and J. Krasniqi (2021). By examining the relationship between economic development and emigration from Kosovo between 2015 and 2020, the authors argue that some EU countries opened up legal migration routes for highly skilled migrants from the Western Balkans, which increased the outflow of specialists in vital sectors such as healthcare and IT. However, all of these studies were conducted before the visa liberalisation between the Republic of Kosovo and the EU, which started on 1 January 2024.

The purpose of this study is to forecast the legal and economic impact of this event on migration processes in the country.

Materials and methods

In the course of the study, the following methods were used: statistical analysis, synthesis, and comparison method. In particular, the method of comparison was used to compare data for previous years on such key development indicators as gross domestic product, unemployment, and average wages. In addition, the literature review method was used to analyse a range of scientific works by Kosovo

and foreign authors. As part of the theoretical study, the analysis method was also used to assess the impact of migration on the labour market in the Republic of Kosovo and current trends in the formation of human capital. In addition, using the method of retrospective analysis, the author studied the important stages of the creation of independent Kosovo, which later became factors in the formation of inbound and outbound migration policy. The synthesis method was used to systematise and combine data in this area obtained from such sources as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Training Foundation (ETF).

The materials used for this study included analytical reports by the World Bank on GDP, unemployment, migration and wages in the Republic of Kosovo, information from the Kosovo Statistics Agency on the historical context of the labour market in the Republic, as well as information from the United Nations Development Programme (2020) on the relationship between the labour market and migration in the country. A dedicated analysis of trends such as the dynamics of net migration from 2008 to 2021 and the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and subsequent quarantine restrictions on GDP and the share of remittances in the economy was also conducted. Hypothesis testing was used to investigate the assumptions about Kosovo's intellectual losses in the labour market, the so-called "brain drain".

The visualisation method was used to create histograms and line graphs showing the dynamics of Kosovo's GDP, unemployment rate, average wage, net migration rates by year, and the share of remittances from workers to their home countries in gross domestic product by year. Furthermore, by using Open-source intelligence (OSINT), the main expectations of the population, government officials and professionals were identified from visa liberalisation with the EU in 2024, which would allow Kosovo citizens to stay in the EU without visas for 90 days within any 180 days. The forecasting method, based on the experience of neighbouring Balkan countries, was used to model, and describe the possible impact of these changes on labour migration processes in the Republic of Kosovo and the prospects for further strengthening of the state's relations with the European Union.

Results

Since the declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, the Republic of Kosovo has been recognised by more than 100 UN member states, mostly with developed economies and responsible social policies. However, neighbouring Serbia, which does not recognise Kosovo's state sovereignty, keeps the situation on its northern and eastern borders tense, which does not contribute to either political or economic stability within the country. The EU, for its part, is doing its best to help normalise relations between the two countries, offering to mediate a dialogue, but many controversial issues and social problems remain.

Despite this, Kosovo has experienced tangible economic progress in previous years, which has not been enough to provide citizens with a sufficient number of formal jobs. The issue of employment remains one of the most sensitive in society, and it is therefore crucial for Kosovo to increase economic productivity and create more quality jobs in a short time. Successful implementation of such plans requires, first and foremost, a government programme of investment in human capital and the creation of an enabling environment

for private business. The current economic situation and development over the years of independence is well character-

ised by the GDP indicator. The dynamics of this indicator are shown in Figure 1.

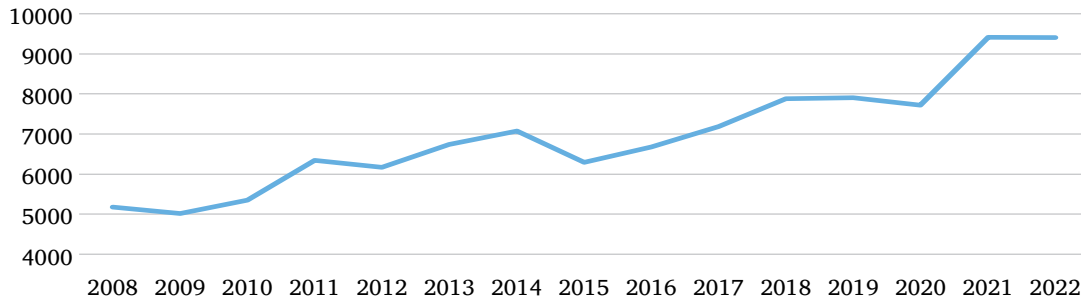


Figure 1. Kosovo’s GDP by years, million USD

Source: compiled by the authors based on the data from the World Bank (2023a)

As can be seen from the chart above, fifteen years have seen different stages in the formation of Kosovo’s independent economy, but the overall dynamics are positive. From 2015 to 2021, there was almost linear GDP growth, followed by a noticeable slowdown, when the figure of 9.41 billion USD remained unchanged for the whole of 2022. Despite this pause in development, the following year, 2023, showed positive dynamics, and Kosovo’s GDP in the first half of 2023

grew by almost 3% year-on-year, in particular due to strong export performance (9.8% year-on-year). At the same time, the formalisation of the labour market is also growing steadily, as evidenced by a 2.3% increase in official employment between July 2022 and July 2023. In addition, the number of registered job seekers decreased by 53% between July 2022 and 2023. The dynamics of the unemployment rate in recent years are shown in Figure 2.

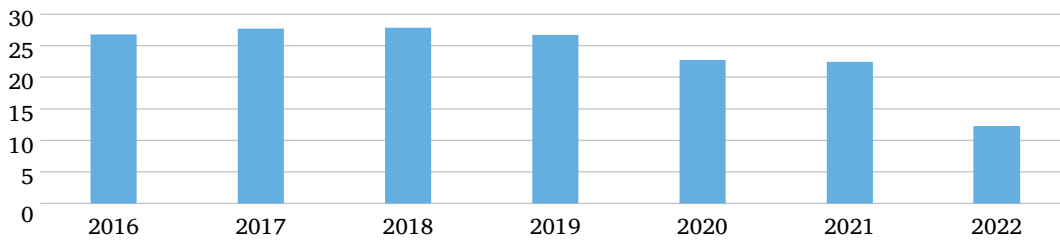


Figure 2. The unemployment rate in Kosovo among people aged 18-64, %

Source: compiled by the authors

Figure 2 shows that unemployment in Kosovo is on a negative trend, but to conclude, it is necessary to analyse

this indicator in the context of net migration, which is shown in Figure 3.

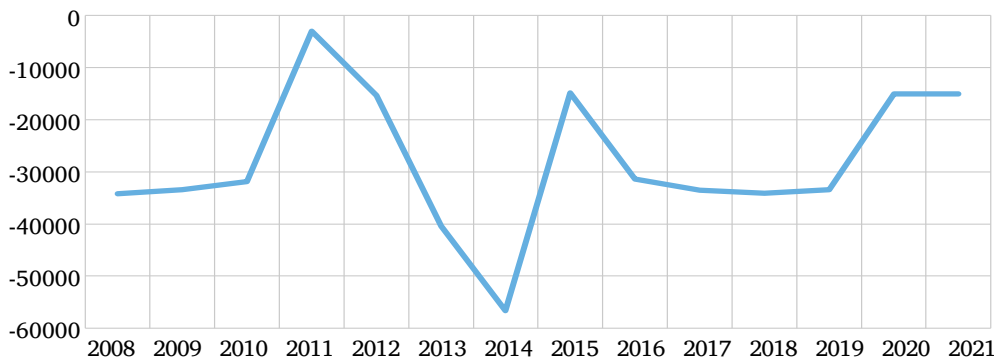


Figure 3. Net migration from Kosovo, people

Source: compiled by the authors based on the data from the World Bank (2022)

Net migration, after the large outflows of 2014 and 2016-2019, has not exceeded 15 thousand people in recent years, which is within the statistical margin of error. Accordingly, a radical outflow of labour abroad, as was the case in 2013-2014, has been prevented. Combined with the decline in the unemployment rate, these indicators demon-

strate a significant improvement in the labour market in the Republic as of 2023.

The level of average wages, according to the Kosovo Statistics Agency, is also showing a steady upward trend (Fig. 4). In general, according to the World Bank (2023b), the country’s medium-term economic prospects remain

positive. GDP growth is expected to accelerate to 4%, bringing the level of economic activity closer to Kosovo's true potential. In addition, according to experts, in 2023 the fiscal deficit will remain below 1% of GDP due to positive tax revenues and lower-than-budgeted capital expenditures, and public debt will remain below 20% of GDP. It is also expected that thanks to the implementation of the Energy Strategy, the contribution of investments to economic growth will

become even greater in 2024-2025. However, the ongoing uncertainty associated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the general temporary slowdown in European economic development and the internal Kosovo political context poses certain risks for the future. According to the OECD Report, more than half of labour migrants from Kosovo are overqualified for the work they do, and this figure is the highest among the Western Balkan countries (Labour Migration in..., 2022).

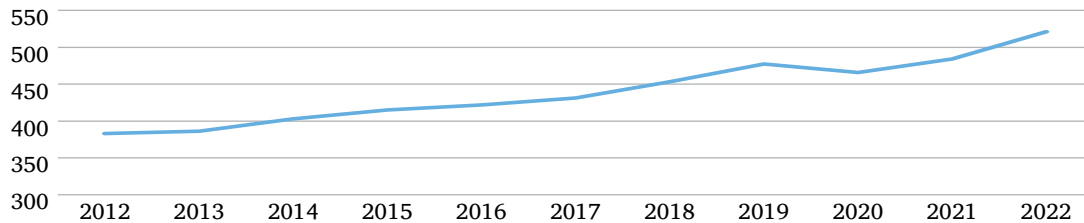


Figure 4. Average salary level in Kosovo, EUR

Source: compiled by the authors

To manage labour migration flows more responsibly and improve working conditions for Kosovo migrants, the OECD recommends strengthening the coordination of relevant institutions and joining efforts to legalise information on actual workers, promoting migrants' skills development abroad by adapting curricula and introducing a common system of recognition by destination countries, and building capacity for professional development in the Republic of Kosovo. To maximise Kosovo's benefits from existing migration processes, the OECD also recommends that the state strengthen its engagement with its diaspora, create a favourable environment for remittances, develop a national investment promotion programme, and facilitate the return of emigrants by simplifying administrative procedures (Labour Migration in..., 2022).

The ETF study, another reputable international organisation that also deals with labour shortages in the Balkan region and the qualifications of migrant workers, shows that there is still a mismatch between labour supply and demand in Kosovo (Gashi, 2021). According to their data, on average, from 2015 to 2019, the Employment Agency of the Republic managed to fill about 30% of vacancies, which can be described as an indicator of the mismatch between the qualifications of the unemployed and the requirements of employers. The results of the STEP study by the World Bank (2021) also showed that skills and experience are the main barriers to recruitment, especially for professions in demand in the market. In particular, innovative firms that have introduced new production methods in the previous

three years, as well as firms that have invested in research and development, faced limitations in the qualifications of potential staff. A survey conducted in 2021 by the United Nations Development Programme (2020) among the management of 201 Kosovo companies also showed that companies have difficulty finding qualified labour. Notably, among the industries with the greatest problems with hiring specialists, the most pronounced unmet demand is in construction and manufacturing companies, as well as in service firms. Almost two out of three companies agreed to hire less qualified workers (63%), while 19% reported that additional responsibilities were assigned to existing staff.

The STEP study also showed that foreign-owned companies experience a high level of shortage of qualified personnel for both higher-skilled and medium- and low-skilled occupations. A survey among the management of 38 Kosovo companies showed that only 21% of respondents meet their staffing needs in the domestic labour market (Zogaj-Gashi *et al.*, 2019). At the same time, 60% of company owners believe that the vocational education system graduates' students without the necessary experience, and 48% of employers note that yesterday's students lack basic social and emotional skills such as punctuality, systematicity, socialisation. The shortage of skilled labour within the country is primarily due to more attractive conditions offered by foreign employers. This is indirectly evidenced by the number of remittances (as a % of GDP) coming into the country from labour migrants (Fig. 5).

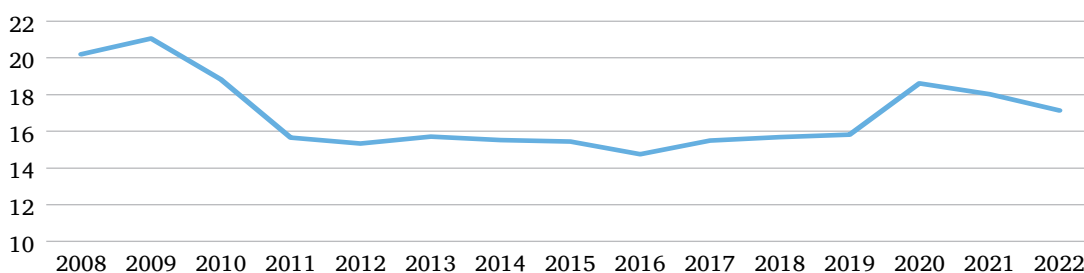


Figure 5. Remittances from individuals to Kosovo, % of GDP

Source: compiled by the author based on the data from the World Bank (2023b)

It is worth noting that after the relative stability of this indicator during 2011-2019 and the peak growth in 2020, likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the last few years have seen a downward trend in the impact of personal remittances to Kosovo from abroad on GDP. Combined with optimistic data on the decline in unemployment and the decline in net migration, the negative trend in remittances may indicate positive changes in the domestic labour market.

Another marker of the country's correct development was the liberalisation of the visa regime for Kosovo citizens, which came into force on 1 January 2024. For many years, the government of Kosovo has been fulfilling the requirements and recommendations of the EU to meet the conditions for visa-free travel, and finally, numerous reforms and integration processes have been successful. However, such changes may significantly affect the current balance in the labour markets of the Balkan countries. While there used to be a fairly large pool of unskilled workers who did not even consider labour migration to the countries of the "Old Europe", as obtaining visas was a rather complicated and costly process, the flow of guest workers to the EU countries may increase after the visa abolition (Bozorgmehr & Díaz, 2022). Currently, all four countries with which Kosovo borders: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – are not members of the European Union and the Schengen area, and it was on their territory that the migrant workers who did not obtain a visa and did not go on to work in Croatia or Germany stopped. Currently, the situation is changing radically, and all Kosovo passport holders no longer have any restrictions on further movement inland. For a more complete understanding of the regional context, it is worthwhile to look at Kosovo's relations with each of its neighbouring countries in terms of labour migration.

Kosovo maintains friendly relations with Albania, and Tirana was one of the first countries to recognise the new state's independence in 2008. Historically, the territory of Kosovo has been inhabited by Kosovo Albanians (Kosovars), and according to the 2007 census, their share exceeds 90%. There is also no language barrier, as the Kosovo-Metohija dialect of Albanian is one of the official languages of Kosovo and is spoken by almost 9% of the population. Accordingly, Albania is a very attractive option for potential labour migrants, especially given the country's geographical location – 362 km of coastline with two seas, the Adriatic and Ionian, which provide for a strong tourism potential. The development of the tourism industry creates a high demand for workers, particularly low-skilled workers, and labour migrants from Kosovo often fill these vacancies (Archer, 2023). However, a particular problem is that Albania does not use all its seaside recreational opportunities sufficiently, and thus, work for Kosovars in the country is mostly seasonal.

Another country with direct access to the Adriatic Sea and bordering Kosovo is Montenegro. The tourism industry is much more developed there than in neighbouring Albania, and the country attracts labour migrants with relatively high wages for the region. In addition, the need for human resources is observed here all year round, because in addition to the seaside towns of Budva and Kotor, where the labour market is more active in summer, Montenegro has various ski resorts in the Durmitor National Park, where the surge in labour activity of workers of various qualifications occurs in the winter months. One of the disadvantages of this area of labour migration for Kosovars is competition from

Serbia, which also borders Montenegro. At the same time, Serbs have an advantage in terms of language, as Serbian is more widespread than even Montenegrin, while Albanian is only fourth, at 5% of users (Stojanov, 2023).

Kosovo's relations with Serbia itself are the most complicated in the region, and therefore labour migration in this direction has a specific character. Official Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's statehood and considers these territories to be its own. The Kosovo Serbs living in the north of the country also largely share these ambitions and sabotage the strengthening of Kosovo's statehood in the region. For example, in April 2023, during the municipal elections in Kosovo, ethnic Serbs boycotted them, and after the victory of the mayors of Albanian origin, they protested the results of the vote, even leading to violent clashes (Kamberi & Hasjani, 2023). This border specificity affects migration processes, and the northern border is crossed mainly by Kosovo Serbs to earn money. It is noteworthy that many of these anti-European rhetoric citizens hold Serbian passports in addition to Kosovo passports, which means they have long been able to travel to the Schengen area without visas. Therefore, the liberalisation of the visa regime in Kosovo since 2024 has not particularly affected their ability to travel.

North Macedonia, which once sheltered many Kosovars during the war and recognised Kosovo's statehood, has friendly relations with the Republic but is not a popular destination for labour migration. With the introduction of visa-free travel, migrant workers currently working in North Macedonia are likely to move on to more prosperous Schengen countries. Although visa liberalisation does not formally provide for the possibility of official employment in the EU and is designed mainly for tourism purposes, all labour market participants in Kosovo and neighbouring countries understand the reality that visa-free travel will be used, in particular, by Kosovars wishing to work abroad. According to the BIRN portal, Yusuf Azemi, chairman of the Kosovo Private Sector Employees' Union, is confident that when additional opportunities open up for an employee, the worker will certainly take advantage of them (Isufi, 2023). He predicts that in 2024, around 150 thousand workers in Kosovo may change their jobs.

Nevertheless, a large outflow of human capital from Kosovo is not expected. As for highly skilled professionals with sufficient education and skills, obtaining a Schengen visa was not difficult for them even before 2024, so visa-free travel did not have a major impact on the plans of white or blue-collar workers. The liberalisation of the regime will primarily benefit labour migrants who have already left Kosovo and are now working in countries bordering the Republic. With the possibility of a 90-day legal stay in the EU, they will look for better working conditions. It is likely that, as part of the rebalancing of supply and demand, their jobs will be taken by Kosovars who previously worked for the domestic market within the country, but this phenomenon will not be widespread. According to the same portal, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Nora Hasani, executive director of the Kosovo-German Chamber of Commerce, believes that businesses in Kosovo have already faced a labour crisis before, as many EU countries have been granting visas to Kosovars for certain professions for years and there has always been an opportunity to travel to Europe seeking work (Isufi, 2023). Accordingly, as can be seen, liberalisation did not significantly affect the domestic market and Kosovo did

not become deserted after 1 January. As for the most marginalised communities in remote provincial towns, visa-free travel has hardly affected their labour history, as they usually do not even have passports. Therefore, considering all the current indicators of Kosovo's economic development, public sentiment, and the peculiarities of the local labour market, it is not worth expecting a radical outflow of large numbers of labour migrants from the republic as a result of visa liberalisation with the EU.

Discussion

The liberalisation of the EU visa regime with Kosovo is a truly historic event, especially in the context of changing the balance of migration flows. In general, both Kosovo's relations with the EU and migration processes in the Balkan region have been repeatedly studied by leading European scholars. B. Mexhuani (2023) analysed the EU's role in shaping Kosovo's political future, focusing on the successes and consequences of the EU's involvement in Kosovo and Serbia. By comparing the EU's political approach to Kosovo and its relations with other countries in the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, the author highlighted the unique challenges Kosovo faces on its path to European integration. In particular, the non-recognition of statehood by Serbia and five EU countries significantly hinders organisational processes (Kravtsov, 2023). Nevertheless, as noted in this study, visa liberalisation should bring Kosovo and Europe closer together.

R. Dopchie (2022), who also examined the mediating role of the European Union in the normalisation of relations between the Republic of Kosovo and Serbia according to the rational choice theory, emphasised the different perspectives of the parties to the concept of normalisation. While Kosovo and the EU have opened and declared conditions, Serbia's approach to normalisation remains a challenge due to its ambiguity and lack of transparency (Sraieb, 2022). Nevertheless, the liberalisation that this article focuses on should have a positive impact on Kosovo Serbs and demonstrate all the benefits of a normal European life without separatist slogans. As mentioned above, the path to visa-free travel and the aspirations for EU membership forced the Kosovo administration and government to act quickly and decisively. This was also noted in their study by A. Fejzullahu and B. Belegu (2022), who analysed the public administration reform in the country. Since it is the public sector that is responsible for creating the conditions and legislative framework for the labour market, the level of management in this area is very important. Accordingly, as the authors emphasise, the European future of Kosovo depends on the success of such reforms.

The significant role of the Kosovo diaspora, whose economic contribution was discussed in this paper, was also studied by T. Fang and A. Wells (2023). The authors found that modern technological advances in communication and transport strengthen diaspora ties with their homeland, and the ease of bank transfers makes it possible to support the family at a distance. Furthermore, there is evidence that diaspora members are crucial to the formation of international business and commercial networks due to their ability to help overcome language or cultural barriers (Leontyev & Ketners, 2023). The importance of remittances from the diaspora for Kosovo's economy was also noted in this study. A series of educational programmes in Kosovo that contribute to the country's human capitalisation, as mentioned in

this paper, were examined by A.B. Youssef *et al.* (2021). By studying the intentions of 310 Kosovo students from two universities regarding their future entrepreneurial activities, the authors proved that personal attitudes as well as characteristics of social behaviour are the main indicators of entrepreneurial intentions. Accordingly, if the state encourages young people to engage in private commercial activities, the problem of labour shortage in the country will be solved.

An important issue of returning labour migrants to their homeland was raised by a group of North Macedonian scientists led by A. Hajdari *et al.* (2023), who studied the impact of education and knowledge transfer by repatriated entrepreneurs on business development. It was proved that the time spent abroad does not significantly affect the success of entrepreneurship in the homeland, which means that guest workers from Kosovo, who are currently working abroad, will be able to return and invest their capital in their country's economy without significant losses. M. Zoppi (2022), studying socio-demographic challenges and labour migration in the Balkan countries, drew attention to the fact that public investment in education and training in the absence of a competitive national labour market can be wasted if, after graduation, a potential employee leaves to increase human capital in another country rather than staying at home. To avoid this, the state must create decent conditions not only for studying but also for further employment (Tomashovski & Yaroshenko, 2020). The need to create a competitive salary market was also discussed in this study.

Analysing the experiences of those who have returned to Kosovo, K. Kusari (2023) concludes that repatriation remains the best political solution that benefits all parties. According to the author, in 2015, Kosovars were the fourth largest group of asylum seekers in the EU, but 96% of them were rejected. Since Kosovo's state-building and migration policies are heavily influenced by the UN and the EU, it is necessary to focus financial assistance from international institutions on improving the state of the economy within the country (Palmer & Drbohlav, 2022). According to the economic indicators of this study, a positive trend in this direction has already begun. Foreign direct investment in Kosovo, which is responsible for the economic growth mentioned in this study, was studied by K. Conahan *et al.* (2021) and proved that the current demographic situation and sound investment legislation create positive conditions for attracting foreign finance to the country. In addition to the large number of industries available to investors as part of the privatisation programme in Kosovo, the state has also created several economic zones that further facilitate the flow of money into the economy of the Republic of Kosovo. If this approach continues, the country and society will not feel any negative economic consequences of visa liberalisation.

A study on labour migration in the Balkan countries was also conducted by G. Miladinov (2022). The results of the study show that the region, except Slovenia, has inefficient migration statistics and serious access restrictions, and the only source of migration data is the census and administrative data. As a result, the author describes such statistics as questionable, but at the time of writing, there were no problems with the reliability of information from either the World Bank or the Kosovo Statistics Agency. An important nuance of the European integration of Kosovo and other Balkan countries was discussed by I. Kalemaj and E. Kalemaj (2022). The unjustified aggressive war against Ukraine, the impact

of which on economic indicators was mentioned above, literally forced the European Union to strengthen integration processes and become a more monolithic structure before the possible further spread of aggression on the continent. Accordingly, this contributed, among other things, to the implementation of plans to introduce visa-free travel to Kosovo.

L. Naumovski (2021), studying the attractiveness of intellectual migration in the Western Balkans, emphasised that the liberalisation of capital, labour and intellectual property is driven by economic globalisation and affects all countries of the world, but primarily developing economies. Analysing the reasons for labour migration and changes in legislation, the author concludes that the abolition of visas in the Balkan countries has never led to uncontrolled consequences and a massive outflow of human resources, and therefore, the liberalisation of entry to the EU for Kosovars will not significantly affect migration flows. The factors behind the unwavering political and popular support for Kosovo's EU integration have been studied by G. Krasniqi (2023), determining that the self-identification of Kosovo's citizens is closely linked to the ideas of Euro-Atlantic and Western values. According to the study, almost a third of Kosovo's citizens already live or have lived in other European countries, and therefore, liberalisation of entry to the EU will not lead to significant changes in the labour market.

Overall, Kosovo's civilizational choice for its European future should be welcomed and the country should be encouraged to integrate further. Due to the synergistic effect, such increased communication will have a positive impact on the development of Europe and Kosovo, and visa liberalisation is only the beginning of the integration path.

Conclusions

Although the Republic of Kosovo is the youngest country in Europe, it has managed to survive severe crises, public disbelief in the country's economic success, and separatist challenges in the decade and a half since its independence. Nevertheless, owing to the support of European countries, Kosovo has been able to meet all the challenges, and the country's economy is showing sustainable development.

Visa liberalisation, which took place in early 2024, is expected to affect migration flows, but not radically. Since the

new rules do not allow official employment and the period of legal stay in the EU is limited to only 90 days, the new opportunity will be taken up mainly by those Kosovars already working in the neighbouring countries of the Republic of Kosovo. Likely, some of the jobs in Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia that will be vacated in this way will be taken by Kosovo citizens who had previously worked in the domestic market, but this human capital drain will be insignificant. This forecast is further supported by the fact that, as shown in the article, Kosovo's economy is growing by many indicators, which means that the number of vacancies with decent pay in various sectors of the country will only increase. All the Balkan countries have gone through similar procedures with the introduction of visa-free travel, and it has never led to any negative legal or economic consequences. Moreover, the elimination of the visa barrier will help Kosovars to better understand the democratic values of Old Europe, and EU citizens, on the contrary, to understand the national and cultural codes of Kosovo's citizens and visit such iconic places as the Emin Gjiku ethnographic museum in Pristina and the monasteries of Metohija without visas.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in modelling the possible consequences of the introduction of visa-free travel for the labour market of Kosovo and neighbouring countries, as well as in formulating recommendations on measures to return migrant workers home to strengthen the economic position of the Republic – since liberalisation took place only on 1 January this year, this paper is one of the first to assess the beginning of the process. The intensification of mutual tourist exchange, which will significantly intensify in 2024, should push the authorities of the Republic of Kosovo to create special tourist and ethnic clusters, the development of which could be the subject of further research. Moreover, the discovery of the unique Kosovo culture for Europe should become part of the grand national idea and, accordingly, further scientific consideration.

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Conflict of interest

None.

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Лібералізація візового режиму та трудова міграція: правові та економічні наслідки для Косово

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Анотація. За роки незалежності Косово сформувало певні відносини з сусідніми державами та країнами Західної Європи, але значне спрощення процедури перетину кордону з країнами Шенгенської зони, яке набуло чинності з 1 січня 2024 року, вимагає перегляду існуючих балансів та формування актуальних оцінок можливих наслідків. Метою дослідження було прогнозування подальшого розвитку відносин між Косово та ЄС у контексті міграційних процесів. Для дослідження ключових економічних показників попередніх років щодо перспектив перерозподілу трудових ресурсів використовувалися методи статистичного та ретроспективного аналізу. Дослідження доводить позитивний розвиток економіки Косово шляхом аналізу таких важливих економічних показників за попередні роки, як валовий внутрішній продукт, рівень безробіття, чиста міграція з Косово, середня заробітна плата в країні, обсяг грошових переказів, отриманих економікою від трудових мігрантів, які працюють за кордоном. Окреме дослідження було присвячене відносинам Косово з сусідніми країнами – Албанією, Сербією, Чорногорією та Північною Македонією. У контексті процесів трудової міграції було оцінено досвід роботи косоварів у цих країнах, а також спрогнозовано зміни балансів на ринках праці, спричинені візовою лібералізацією. На основі отриманих даних і зроблених висновків зроблено прогноз щодо економічних і політичних наслідків безвізового режиму для косоварів: перспективою роботи в Шенгенській зоні скористаються ті громадяни Республіки Косово, які вже працюють за кордоном, і значного відтоку наявних в країні трудових ресурсів не відбудеться. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в моделюванні подальшого розвитку ринку праці в Косово, яке буде корисним для менеджерів державних підприємств і великих приватних роботодавців при формуванні своїх HR-стратегій

Ключові слова: європейська інтеграція; ринок праці; дефіцит робочої сили; репатріація; динамічний розвиток