



stay & thrive

Retaining Youth Through Business and Culture

This report is produced by Dr. Aidan Hehir and Jeta Zagragja and funded by the Open Society Foundations - Western Balkans. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the Open Society Foundations—Western Balkans.

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Introduction

Outward youth migration is one of the most significant challenges facing Kosovo.

Low wages and limited job prospects are often cited as the primary reasons for Kosovo's outward migration trend. While increased external investment is necessary to address this, we believe there is untapped potential within Kosovo to build thriving domestic industries. Encouraging and supporting local business entrepreneurs is essential to creating sustainable jobs and prosperity.

Cultural opportunities – or the lack thereof – also play a crucial role in decisions to leave. Cultural vibrancy, from sports and music to theatre and arts, is integral to strengthening societal bonds. A dynamic cultural scene not only creates employment and income generation, but it also **enhances a country's "soft power" internationally, attracting investment and tourism.**

We therefore believe that **fostering growth within Kosovo requires a dual approach:** the government must focus on enhancing both economic and cultural opportunities to retain young talent. Our project – "Stay and Thrive: Retaining Youth Through Business and Culture" – is designed to advance innovative strategies to achieve both.

Based on interviews, workshops, and surveys, we have identified:

- The key factors determining whether young people stay in or leave Kosovo.
- The challenges facing business and cultural entrepreneurs, and what they need to overcome them.
- How the government can best support entrepreneurs in Kosovo.

Our goal in conducting this research and writing this report is **to foster entrepreneurship, showcase the country's vibrant cultural and business opportunities, and generate a positive shift so that the youth of Kosovo will "stay and thrive".**



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Methodology

The quantitative and qualitative research gathered to write this report comprised three phases:

1. Survey

In February 2025 UBO Consulting carried out a survey – via face-to-face computer assisted personal interviews – of **250 final-year university students** in Kosovo from four Universities; The University of Prishtina (100 students), The University of Prizren (50 students), The International Business College Mitrovica (50 students) and The Rochester Institute of Technology in Kosovo (50 students).

The survey was conducted in three phases; Data Collection & Technology using Kobo Toolbox; Research Execution & Quality Control; Data Analysis & Presentation using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

2. Interviews

Ten interviews were conducted during March, April and May 2025; five with experts on cultural entrepreneurship and five with experts on business entrepreneurship. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The full list of interviewees is available in the References section.

3. Workshops

Two workshops – one with cultural entrepreneurs and one with business entrepreneurs – were held in Pristina on the 28th and 29th May 2025. The proceedings were recorded and transcribed. The full list of workshop participants is available in the References section.

Administrative support and research assistance was provided by:



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Kosovo's Economic Status

International "Deterioration"

According to the World Bank, because of a number of 'adverse shocks', 'increased trade uncertainty' and 'heightened policy uncertainty' the global economy is experiencing a period of 'deterioration' (2025d, xvii). While the impact of this downturn has been felt everywhere, the 'Western Balkan Six' (WB6)¹ have 'shown encouraging signs of economic resilience' (World Bank, 2025a, 14).

Kosovo's Positive Record

Though Kosovo faces 'a challenging external environment' (World Bank, 2025a, 85), its economy is performing well. The World Bank described Kosovo's economic performance in 2024 as 'positive' commending in particular the declining trend in poverty, strong private consumption and decreasing inflation. Due to 'prudent fiscal policy', both the fiscal deficit and debt are low (World Bank, 2025a, 85). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also recognized that 'notable advancements' had been made (2024, 19), the European Union's (EU) European Commission likewise praised the government of Kosovo's economic policies as 'prudent' (2024, 47), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that Kosovo's 'growth is expected to remain strong' (2025, 1).

The WB6 countries collectively recorded **GDP growth of 3.5% in 2024**, a 0.1% increase on the previous year and higher than the EU average (World Bank, 2025a, 14). As illustrated in Figure 1, **Kosovo's GDP growth has been the highest amongst the WB6** for the past two years.

Figure 1: GDP growth (percent)

GDP growth (percent)	2022	2023	2024	2025
Albania	4.8	3.9	3.9	3.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4.2	2.0	2.6	2.7
North Macedonia	2.8	2.1	2.8	2.6
Montenegro	6.4	6.3	3.0	3.0
Serbia	2.6	3.8	3.9	3.5
Kosovo	4.3	4.1	4.4	3.8

(World Bank, 2025a, 16)

In 2024 the average fiscal deficit in the WB6 increased from 2023 by 0.7% to 2.2% of GDP. Kosovo and Albania were the only countries to record improved fiscal balances, and **Kosovo's tax revenues increased by 9.3% in 2024** (World Bank, 2025a, 15 & 28).

Average inflation across the WB6 decreased from 9.3% in 2023 to 3.3% in 2024. As illustrated in Figure 2, Kosovo recorded the lowest rate of inflation amongst the WB6 in 2024.

Figure 2: Inflation 2024

Serbia	North Macedonia	Montenegro	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo
4.6	3.5	3.4	2.2	1.7	1.6

(World Bank, 2025a, 14).

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

Kosovo was also the only country in the WB6 not to record weaker exports because of ‘subdued economic activity in the EU’ (World Bank, 2025a, 15). **Kosovo attracted high levels of Foreign Direct Investment**, especially in real estate (World Bank, 2025a, 46) and the World Bank described the growth performance of modern services in Kosovo, such as IT, as ‘strong’ and ‘encouraging’ (World Bank, 2025a, 28).

The OECD described Kosovo as ‘a regional leader’ in state-owned enterprises and trade policy (OECD, 2024, 19). They praised the government for creating ‘**a more favorable business environment for foreign direct investment**’ noting ‘improved governance and enhanced efforts to create a qualified workforce’ had led to ‘**significant advances in the tourism sector**’ (OECD, 2024, 20).

The EU Commission also noted that the government of Kosovo had made progress in improving the ‘business environment’, highlighting the ‘Law on the Register of Beneficial Owners’, ‘positive developments in settling commercial disputes’, new legislation on sustainable investment, and ‘intensified efforts to reduce the informal sector’ (2024, 50).

The IMF also commended the government of Kosovo’s ‘ambitious strategic energy goals’ and their commitment ‘to making continued and meaningful progress’ to expand renewable generation capacity, reduce pollution, improve energy efficiency, and engage in regional cooperation (2025, 2).

Obstacles to Kosovo’s Growth

Despite these positives, Kosovo faces **many obstacles to growth** which have adversely affected its economic performance.

In 2024, Kosovo was the only one of the WB6 not to report rising employment and activity rates (World Bank, 2025a, 18). The EU Commission warned, ‘the labour market continues to **suffer from very low participation, high unemployment, and large gender gaps**’ (2024, 51). The employment rate in Kosovo – 36.5% – is the lowest amongst the WB6 (World Bank, 2025a, 22).

The overall WB6 regional unemployment rate declined to 10.1% in 2024; Kosovo, however, was the only country to experience an increase in unemployment from 2023 (World Bank, 2025a, 23).

The labor force participation rate in Kosovo increased slightly to 41.6% in 2024, but remains ‘significantly low, with large gender disparities’ (World Bank, 2025a, 23). **Kosovo has the highest inactivity rate in the WB6**; of approximately 1.1 million working-age people, 461,000 **(43%) are economically active**, either **employed (89%)** or **unemployed (11%)**.

The majority – 613,000 (57%) – of the working-age population are economically inactive; 66% are women, 34% men (GAP Institute, 2025, 4).

By comparison, approximately 39% of the global working-age population is outside the labor market and within the OECD area, the average economic inactivity rate is 26% (GAP Institute, 2025, 8).

The regional youth unemployment rate in the WB6 was **24.3% in 2024**, over twice the overall unemployment rate and 10% above the EU rate (World Bank, 2025a, 22). **Kosovo had the highest rate of youth unemployment amongst the WB6 in 2023** (EU Commission, 2024, 51) **but by the end of 2024 it had the lowest rate** (World Bank, 2025a, 23).

The poverty rate across the WB6 decreased by nearly 3% annually prior to 2019; since then, there has been a significantly slower reduction (World Bank, 2025a, 14). Kosovo has the highest poverty rate in the WB6 – 19.6% – though the deputy manager of the World Bank for Kosovo, Jane Sprouster, predicted this would fall by over 2% in 2025 (Telegrafi, 2025).

The low labor force participation and employment rates – particularly among women – continue to act as ‘key constraints to poverty reduction’ (World Bank, 2025a, 86). The IMF cited the ‘large gender gap’ as one of Kosovo’s main ‘economic and social challenges’ (2025, 17). While the government has implemented several policies specifically designed to address this, the impact has been ‘modest’ (World Bank, 2025c, 1). **Kosovo has the lowest per capita income amongst the WB6** – Figure 3 – though this figure has increased steadily **since independence in 2008 when it was just \$2,877.4**.

Figure 3: GDP per capita (US\$)

Serbia	Montenegro	Albania	North Macedonia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	WB6 Average
13,523.7	12,935.5	10,011.6	9,310	8,957.4	7,229.4	10,327.9

(World Bank, 2025e).

The EU Commission noted that the education system was ‘undermined by an absence of quality learning materials in schools, a lack of initial training and continuous professional development for teachers, and an insufficient number of inspectors for teachers’ assessment’ (2024, 52; see also, OECD, 2024, 21).

They also warned that the budget allocated for research and innovation was **‘far below’ the 0.7% of GDP required by law, criticized the ‘limited progress’** made in improving road and rail infrastructure, and the failure to diversify the energy supply which meant the energy sector remained ‘a key bottleneck for Kosovo’s economic development’ (EU Commission, 2024, 52).

They further warned ‘the tax base continues to be weakened by numerous tax exemptions, preferential tax rates and special regimes’ and criticized the government’s failure to create a fiscal oversight body (2024, 47).

The World Bank noted that ‘low firm dynamism and access to finance’ have impeded private sector development and employment creation (World Bank, 2025a, 85).

The EU Commission similarly reported that though Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) account for over 99% of registered businesses, they have difficulty accessing finance; they blamed this ‘obstacle to growth’ on ‘banks’ stringent loan requirements’ which have a particularly adverse effect on SMEs (EU Commission, 2024, 54).

The OECD reported that Kosovo performs worse than most of the other states in the WB6 in the areas of **science, technology and innovation, employment, anti-corruption**, and access to finance policies, noting that ‘substantial improvement is required (OECD, 2024, 19).

The OECD also noted that the government’s policy framework on science, technology and infrastructure ‘remains underdeveloped’ and that budgetary support for public research is ‘significantly below both Kosovo’s legal requirements and EU average levels’.

This has negatively impacted on the government’s ability ‘to promote research and innovation’ (OECD, 2024, 21). They described the selection and prioritization of transport infrastructure projects as ‘outdated’ noting ‘systematic assessments of the potential environmental, social or budgetary impacts of new projects are rarely conducted’ (OECD, 2024, 21).

Kosovo still evidences a ‘high reliance’ on remittances (IMF, 2025, 45). According to the World Bank, in 2023 remittances stood at approximately \$1.9 billion, roughly 18% of Kosovo’s GDP, one of the highest rates worldwide (World Bank, 2024, 33 & 8).

In 2024, due to ‘softening labor markets across the Euro area’ net remittances decreased as a percentage of GDP in Kosovo (World Bank, 2025a, 46) and remittances inflow growth was ‘modest’ (World Bank, 2025a, 86).

Kosovo’s economy also remains ‘dominated’ by the services sector which provides 46% of gross value added (EU Commission, 2024, 53). The IMF also warned that foreign demand for Kosovo’s main exports - minerals and metals - was ‘sluggish’ (2025, 5).

Migration from Kosovo and its Impact

In 1990 there were 154 million migrants globally; today there are 304 million (United Nations, 2025; see also, The Migration Data Portal, 2025).

Due to persistent migration, **one in five WB6 citizens now live abroad**, and the region’s population has decreased by nearly 2.5 million in the last twenty years to just over 16 million (Wankiewicz, 2024, 1).

As illustrated in Figure 4, amongst the WB6, Albania and Kosovo ranked first and second respectively for both numbers of migrants and migrants as a percentage of the population in 2024.

Figure 4: Net Migration WB6 2024

	Albania	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Montenegro	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Serbia	WB6 Average
Net Migration	-44,089	-22,178	-5,728	-1,686	-4,497	-8,132	-86,310
Percentage of population (in 2023)	1.6% (2,777,689)	1.3% (1,682,668)	0.3% (1,827,816)	0.27% (623,529)	0.14% (3,204,802)	0.1% (6,623,183)	0.51% (16,739,687)

(World Bank, 2025b; World Bank, 2025f)

Migration from Kosovo

Migration from Kosovo has been constant since the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia collapsed in 1992.² However, migration from Kosovo continued at a steady pace even after the war ended in 1999 and again after the 2008 declaration of independence; migration increased each year from 2000 to 2008 and surged again from 2012-2015.

As illustrated in Figure 5, net migration has been negative for the past ten years (with the possible exception of 2020). Net emigration greatly exceeds immigration; as such, ‘foreign workers cannot fill the labor force gap’ (GAP Institute, 2025, 4-6).

Figure 5: Net Migration from Kosovo

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
World Bank	-55,524	-8,937	-5,428	-1,386	-8,829	-2,815	-38,584	-28,588	-28,754	-22,178
Kosovo Agency of Statistics	-55,572	-8,940	-5,431	-21,402	-28,845	+2,819	-38,606	-30,888	-15,312	/

(World Bank, 2025f; GAP, 2025, 5)

Estimates suggest that **nearly 800,000 Kosovars now live abroad**; including second generation migrants the figure is nearly 950,000 (World Bank, 2024, 16). As such, almost **one in three people born in Kosovo live abroad**, making Kosovo one of the top five origin countries with the highest emigration rates in the world (World Bank, 2024, 6).³

Kosovar emigrants in OECD countries are **mostly male (55%)** and almost **90% are of working-age** (World Bank, 2024, 20). Men are most likely to move abroad for **‘job or study reasons,’** while **women for marriage or family reunification** (World Bank, 2024, 24).

Over 50% of Kosovar emigrants have at most a lower secondary level of education and among the WB6, Kosovo has the lowest percentage of highly educated migrants in OECD countries (World Bank, 2024, 21).

The primary destinations for Kosovo’s migrants are Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy (Wankiewicz, 2024, 6). More than half of all Kosovar migrants live in Germany

² The World Bank estimates that 463,273 people left in 1998 and 1999 (World Bank, 2025f).

³ According to the GAP Institute the number of Kosovars who had left was 359,000 representing 22.6% of the population (2025, 4). The figure appears to relate to post-independence Kosovo.

Figure 6: Propensity to emigrate from key economic sectors and their productivity

	Numbers of employees in Kosovo	Productivity (in euros)	Percentage of individuals who plan to emigrate
Wholesale and retail trade	84,154	17,525	18.1%
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	11,505	61,935	2.6%
Manufacturing	47,545	28,336	12.9%
Hospitality and gastronomy	30,386	7,265	18.7%
Construction	49,592	16,060	18.7%
Information and communication	10,927	19,024	6.5%
Healthcare	19,993	11,214	7.1%
Education	38,485	8,576	7.1%
Transport and storage	13,541	34,171	3.2%

(GAP, 2025, 6)

In December 2023, a survey on citizens' propensity to emigrate in the first part of 2024 showed that about **28% of Kosovo citizens over 18 planned to emigrate**. Though very high, the figure was lower than previous measurements made in 2007 (30%), 2012 (34%), 2014 (43%), and 2018 (59%) (GAP Institute, 2024, 4).⁴

While many have left, and plan to leave (see Figure 6), data suggests that migrants from Kosovo intend to leave for a limited time; 37% for six months, 34% for two years (World Bank, 2024, 17).

Push Factors

Globally, **migration is primarily impelled by 'increasing and protracted conflicts within and between States', 'climate change' and 'economic inequality'** (The International Organisation for Migration, 2024, 3). In the case of Kosovo – and the WB6 in general – the latter is the primary driver.

The **OECD** notes that despite recent improvements in economic and social prospects, 'structural challenges and socio-economic hardships continue to incentivize emigration from the WB6 economies.' Specifically, they highlight, **'high unemployment levels, comparatively low wages, weak education outcomes and low social security, as well as corruption'** (OECD, 2022, 13).

Likewise, according to the World Bank, **'low-productivity jobs', 'few quality private sector jobs' and 'poor working conditions'** have combined to 'contribute to a lack of viable and attractive economic opportunities for citizens in Kosovo' (2024, 24).

⁴ The destinations for those who planned to leave were Germany with 71.4%, Switzerland 11.7% and Austria with 5.3% (GAP Institute, 2024, 4).

The EU Commission attributed the ‘continuously high emigration rates’ to ‘weak labour market outcomes’⁵ in Kosovo (2024, 51). **The minimum wage in Kosovo - €350** - is the **lowest in the region** though the highest in terms of its share of the average wage in the country (World Bank, 2025a, 24).

A survey of past or current migrants from the WB6 found that more than 70% left to access, ‘public/social services, pension systems, and health systems’ (World Bank, 2024, 25). Likewise, a report by The Centre for Eastern Studies reported that people leave the WB6 because, ‘local political elites are generally uninterested in raising democratic standards, tackling corruption, or improving the judicial system and public services’ (Wankiewicz, 2024, 8).

The GAP Institute found that **people left Kosovo primarily due to ‘collective pessimism’ caused by economic hardship and ‘political instability’** (2024, 5).

Pull Factors

Higher wages constitute a significant **attraction for people in Kosovo**; average gross wages in Croatia are more than twice that in Kosovo and in Germany and Austria they are seven times higher (World Bank, 2024, 7).⁶

Additionally, many countries within the EU are experiencing a rapidly aging population. The number of people in the EU over 65 years increased from 18.3% in 2013 to 21.3% in 2023.

This decline in the working-age population has led to an increased demand for foreign workers (World Bank, 2024, 23). Many EU states have therefore specifically targeted labor migrants in the WB6 (OECD, 2022, 13).

Both Austria and Germany passed legislation creating opportunities for labor migration from Kosovo; the number of Kosovar workers in Germany increased from 67,020 in 2016 to 135,870 in 2023 (World Bank, 2024, 7 & 25).

The Impact of Migration

Economic migration is not singularly negative; indeed, the government of Kosovo’s ‘Strategy on Migration 2021-2025’ described outward migration as ‘an important pillar of the socio-economic development of the country’ (Republic of Kosovo, 2021, 6).

Even if they do not return, migrants **can help their home country** by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and by becoming entrepreneurs thereby creating new employment opportunities and encouraging economic growth and innovation (Wankiewicz, 2024, 9).

Emigration can help to alleviate pressure on the labor market, and those who have moved abroad also learn new skills, gain valuable professional experience, and create new – and wider – business networks.

The World Bank noted that **Kosovo’s diaspora has positive ‘developmental impacts on the country’ and reported ‘90% of those who migrated in the past report gaining valuable experience or skills’** (2024, 18-19).

The International Organization for Migration notes that remittances ‘continue to be a premier source of external finance for low- and middle-income countries, surpassing foreign direct investment and official development assistance’ (2024, 3). The World Bank described remittances as ‘an important poverty alleviation strategy for many Kosovar families’ and found that 25% of business owners surveyed in Kosovo began with financial support from the diaspora (World Bank, 2024, 8 & 34).

However, migration also incurs significant costs. The United Nations Development Programme noted that when skilled people leave a country, economic growth declines (2017, 1). “Brain drain”, ‘imposes significant economic costs on the Western Balkans’ – up to 3% of GDP in some cases – because these countries pay for the education of people who ‘later contribute to the GDP of their destination countries rather than their place of origin’ (Wankiewicz, 2024, 16).

A report by the Westminster Forum for Democracy estimated **total annual cost of educating people leaving Kosovo to be between €180 and €205 million**, ‘an annual loss in potential GDP in the amount of about €519 million...every employable individual emigrating from Kosovo takes an average of **almost €17,000 a year in future potential annual GDP’** (2021, 8).

⁵ ‘Labour market outcomes’ refer to the results/conditions achieved by individuals in employment, including status, wages, job quality, benefits, and career progression.

⁶ Though the GAP Institute gives a lower figure (2025, 18).

The World Bank also noted that emigration represents ‘a significant fiscal loss for the country in the short-term’ because of ‘foregone consumption in the local economy, fewer taxes paid, and lower productivity and innovation’ (2024, 35-36). The GAP Institute estimated that each worker in the manufacturing sector contributes €28,336 in economic added value to the country which is lost if they leave and they warned that brain drain reduces overall productivity and causes a drop in wages (2024, 5-6).

Additionally, while remittances can be beneficial, they are ‘not typically channeled toward productive investments...nearly half (47%) of diaspora investments were in the construction sector and 26% were directly into real estate’ (World Bank, 2024, 33-34).

Remittances can also encourage people to remain unemployed (OECD, 2024, 121; World Bank, 2024, 36).

Emigration can also ‘pose severe developmental challenges’ and ‘create labour market distortions and skill shortages’ which in turn ‘lead to fewer investments due to the potential investors not finding the right skills needed’ (OECD, 2022, 3; see also, World Bank, 2025a, 24).

In Kosovo the outward migration of mostly young people has created a gap in the labor market that is ‘extremely difficult to fill’ (GAP Institute, 2024, 9).

This is especially apparent in sectors such as healthcare, education, information and communication technology, construction, retail trade, hospitality, agriculture and rural development (OECD, 2024, 205; GAP Institute, 2025, 5 & 10). The World Bank noted that Kosovo only has 170 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest in the region and far below the EU average (World Bank, 2024, 35; see also, Republic of Kosovo, 2021, 14).

Additionally, the World Bank estimates that 50% of male emigrants and more than 40% of female emigrants from Kosovo work in low-skilled jobs thus undermining the potential knowledge transfer benefits of migration (World Bank, 2024, 26). **Those who return to Kosovo are also significantly more likely to be unemployed than those who remained** (World Bank, 2024, 31).

For many years **migration from the WB6 was offset by high birth rates but this is no longer the case** (see Figure 7). As a result of low birth rates and migration ‘the demographic future of the region appears bleak’ with the UN estimating that the region’s population will decline by a further 3 million by 2050 (Wankiewicz, 2024, 1).

While over the past twenty years all the WB6 evidence shows declining birth rates, ‘the most dramatic shift has occurred in Kosovo and Albania’ (Wankiewicz, 2024, 4). Kosovo is thus experiencing ‘a significant population decline’ (International Monetary Fund, 2025, 4).

Figure 7: WB6 Population Decline

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	Serbia	North Macedonia	Montenegro
Population (millions)/year of census	3.1 (2001)	3.5 (2013)	1.79 (2011)	7.49 (2002)	2.03 (2002)	625,000 (2011)
Population (millions)/year of census	2.4 (2023)	3.1 (2024)	1.58 (2024)	6.7 (2002)	1.83 (2021)	633,000 (2023)
Percentage of population change	-21%	- 11.4%	-11%	- 10%	- 9%	+ 1.3%

(Wankiewicz, 2024, 2-3).

Research Findings

Survey Results

Results relating to **student perceptions of Kosovo's economy were generally favorable** (see Figure 8). Far more students were confident of **gaining employment in Kosovo** after they completed their degree than those who weren't; the same was true of gaining employment in Kosovo related to their degree. 51% agreed/strongly agreed that Kosovo's economy will grow in the next five years and 48% agreed/strongly agreed they could earn 'a competitive salary in Kosovo that matches my skills and education'. 47% stated that they wanted to stay and work in Kosovo after their degree; only 27% wanted to leave.

Figure 8: Perceptions of Kosovo's Economy

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident of gaining employment in Kosovo after I complete my degree.	14%	13%	28%	33%	12%
I feel confident of gaining employment in Kosovo related to my degree.	12%	16%	25%	32%	16%
I believe Kosovo's economy will grow in the next five years.	10%	18%	20%	39%	12%
I would like to stay and work in Kosovo after I finish my degree.	9%	18%	25%	32%	15%
I believe I will need to seek employment outside Kosovo when I finish my degree.	11%	22%	27%	30%	10%
I believe there are sufficient internship opportunities in Kosovo related to my field of study.	8%	20%	25%	33%	14%
I believe I can earn a competitive salary in Kosovo that matches my skills and education.	6%	23%	23%	35%	13%
I believe corruption and nepotism impact employment opportunities in Kosovo.	6%	19%	28%	31%	17%

However, **40% agreed/strongly agreed that they would have to leave Kosovo to find work**, and **48% agreed/strongly agreed that corruption and nepotism had an impact** on employment opportunities.

Figure 9 illustrates the factors that determine whether students will stay or go. **52% of students** said '**more cultural events**' would encourage them to stay, **50% that 'more business entrepreneurship opportunities'** would encourage them to stay. That these figures are so high shows there is a great opportunity to stem outward migration by focusing on both of these areas.

These results also highlight significant attachment to Kosovo;

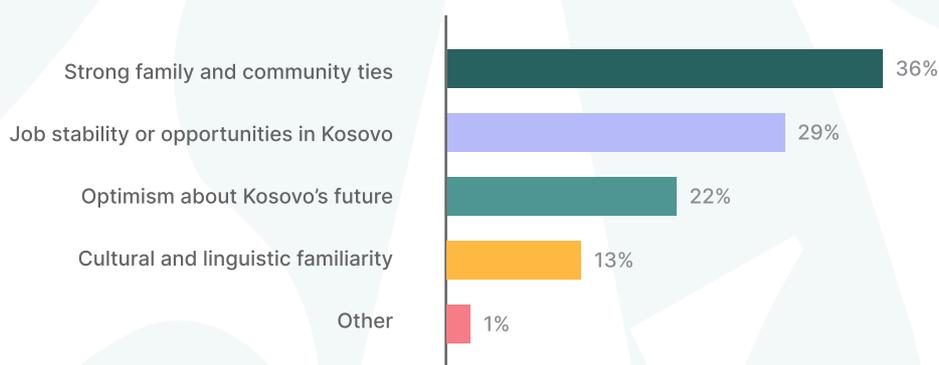
- 50% agreed/strongly agreed that Kosovo provides a good work/life balance;
- 55% agreed/strongly agreed that there was a 'strong sense of community and belonging' in Kosovo;
- 56% had 'a strong emotional attachment to Kosovo';
- 60% said they felt 'a sense of responsibility to contribute to the development of Kosovo'.

Figure 9: Reasons to Stay in Kosovo

	Strongly Dissagre	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
More business entrepreneurship opportunities would encourage me to stay in Kosovo.	3%	16%	32%	36%	14%
More cultural events would encourage me to stay in Kosovo.	5%	11%	33%	39%	13%
Most of my friends believe they will need to seek employment outside Kosovo.	2%	23%	31%	32%	13%
I believe political instability in Kosovo will worsen in the next five years.	4%	15%	31%	38%	12%
I believe threats to Kosovo's security will increase in the next five years.	6%	21%	28%	35%	10%
Having my family close to me is an important reason to stay in Kosovo.	2%	10%	28%	29%	30%
I feel a strong emotional attachment to Kosovo that makes me want to stay.	3%	14%	27%	32%	24%
I feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to the development of Kosovo.	2%	18%	21%	36%	24%
I believe Kosovo provides a strong sense of community and belonging.	2%	22%	21%	37%	18%
I believe Kosovo provides a good work-life balance.	3%	19%	28%	24%	16%
I see a future for myself and my family in Kosovo.	2%	25%	21%	31%	20%

The most popular reason why students would stay in Kosovo – illustrated in Figure 10 – was ‘strong family or community ties’ (36%) which again demonstrates the emotional attachment to Kosovo.

Figure 10: If you plan to remain in Kosovo, what is the main reason behind your choice?



However, while 51% agreed/strongly agreed that they 'see a future for myself and my family in Kosovo', there was evidence that fears exist; 45% agreed/strongly agreed that 'threats to Kosovo's security will increase in the next five years' and 50% agreed/strongly agreed that 'political instability in Kosovo will worsen in the next five years'.

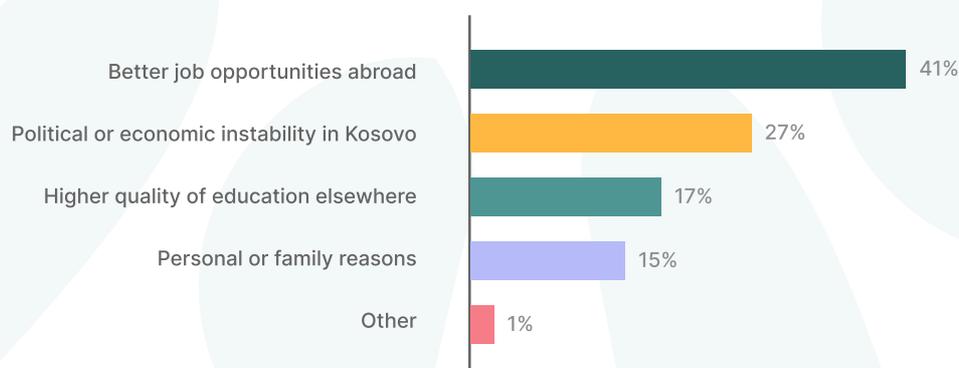
The results illustrated in Figure 11 demonstrate that students believe careers abroad are more attractive.

Figure 11: Perceptions of Employment Outside Kosovo

	Strongly Dissagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe I will find better career opportunities outside Kosovo.	7%	20%	27%	31%	15%
I see greater professional growth and career advancement opportunities outside Kosovo.	6%	14%	32%	32%	16%
I believe I will achieve a higher standard of living outside Kosovo.	3%	20%	31%	29%	17%
I believe I will earn a higher salary if I work outside Kosovo.	4%	9%	35%	32%	20%
I want to experience a new culture and lifestyle outside Kosovo.	4%	23%	31%	24%	18%
I believe other countries offer more opportunities for young professionals.	2%	14%	28%	36%	18%
I believe Kosovo does not yet provide enough support for professionals in my field.	3%	22%	30%	29%	15%

These results – also reflected in the fact that **'better job opportunities abroad' was number one reason given for leaving Kosovo** illustrated in Figure 12 – are not surprising and reflect a broader perception within Kosovo; whether this is actually true, however, is discussed in the next section.

Figure 12: If you plan to leave Kosovo, what is the main reason for your decision?



But beyond this, when these figures in Figure 12 are viewed alongside those in Figure 8 it is clear that **while students in Kosovo believe that they will have better careers abroad, a majority still want to stay in Kosovo.**

The results relating to entrepreneurship in Kosovo again suggest that there is a real opportunity to create conditions that will encourage young people to stay.

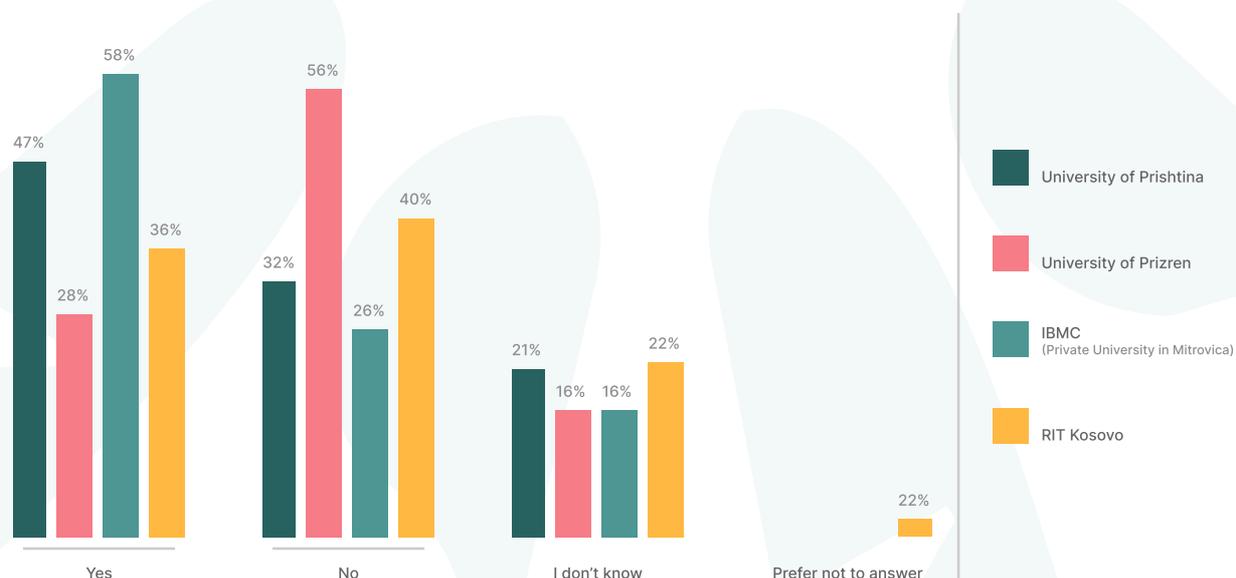
Figure 13: Entrepreneurship in Kosovo

	Strongly Dissagre	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe Kosovo has a thriving community of entrepreneurs.	13%	13%	31%	36%	7%
I know of many successful entrepreneurs from – and based in – Kosovo.	10%	11%	36%	34%	8%
I believe Kosovo needs to do more to promote its successful entrepreneurs domestically and internationally.	9%	17%	25%	35%	14%
I believe Kosovo provides sufficient opportunities for entrepreneurs.	10%	22%	33%	27%	8%
More business entrepreneurship opportunities would encourage me to stay in Kosovo.	7%	12%	27%	38%	16%
More cultural entrepreneurship opportunities would encourage me to stay in Kosovo.	7%	19%	30%	31%	12%

54% agree/strongly agree that more business entrepreneurship opportunities, and 43% that more cultural entrepreneurship opportunities, would encourage them to stay. 49% believe that Kosovo ‘needs to do more to promote its successful entrepreneurs’ while only 35% believe there are enough opportunities for entrepreneurs in Kosovo, just slightly higher than the 32% that don’t.

Overall, 43% of students said they would consider leaving Kosovo, 37% said they would not (with no significant gender difference). Of the four universities, students from the International Business College Mitrovica were the most likely to consider leaving – 58% said yes, 26% said no – while students at the University of Prizren were the least likely, 26% yes, 56% no (see Figure 14). In terms of destinations, 46% of those who wished to leave wanted to go to Germany, 20% to Switzerland and 10% to the US.

Figure 14: Would you consider leaving Kosovo to work abroad? (by University)



Interviews and Workshops

During the interviews and workshops a number of key issues were emphasized by participants; they are arranged thematically below.

Youth Retention

Many noted that Kosovo's youth **are very tech-savvy, speak many languages and have 'a really curious forward-thinking mentality'** (Interview 5). They are, therefore, a significant asset that Kosovo must work to retain.

The reasons given for young people leaving was their belief that they would earn higher wages and find better job opportunities abroad. Visa liberalization had encouraged this but the number who left as a result was 'not nearly as much as we feared' (Interview 6).

Young people – 'raised on social media' – have goals that **'are not always grounded in reality'**. They have a 'different culture [and] different expectations' and **this is especially the case with regards to wages** (Interview 6); 'young people nowadays have much higher expectations for even an entry level job when it comes to salary' (Interview 7). They 'expect to immediately have a big salary' (Interview 8) and this 'huge problem' (Interview 7) contributes to them leaving entrepreneurial careers to earn higher wages abroad or with local 'embassies or international agencies' (Interview 8). Some noted that they had been able to retain employees 'by increasing the salaries' but also by creating a working environment that enables 'employees to be happy' (Interview 10).

Many had an unrealistic 'image of Europe'; though they think they will **'find great jobs'**, they actually have **'better opportunities here'** (Interview 8). Leaving Kosovo was thus seen as a poor career choice; there are more opportunities for career advancement in Kosovo than in the EU but 'young people don't fully recognize that advantage'. Rather than 'just remain an employee abroad', staying in Kosovo enables young people to 'rise quickly' and 'experiment' both of which have 'huge value' (Interview 6). **Lots who left have returned because 'everything was more expensive, the lifestyle more stressful' and they missed their family and friends.** As a result, while 'the salaries were higher' abroad, 'they didn't find what they expected' – having not factored in higher taxes, rent, and overall living costs – and returned (Interview 6).

It was also noted that **'a bigger difficulty' than migration is 'retaining the talent that I trained'**. Many employees could only be employed part-time; as a result, 'they're doing two or three part-time jobs and not just focusing on one thing' (Interview 4). When a full-time position comes up, they take it and thus two businesses lose a trained employee. Additionally, **the increasing shift to remote working 'has definitely impacted us'** (Interview 5); young people in Kosovo can now work for an overseas company that pays a higher salary without leaving Kosovo.

While there are ample opportunities for those who do want to work hard, there also remains a culture within Kosovo that 'good enough is good enough' (Interview 5), which can impede dynamism and ambition. Kosovo's cultural environment tends to value stability and safety over ambition and risk-taking. Children are rarely encouraged to develop practical skills, explore their interests through real-world experiences, or take part-time jobs. Conversations about career planning, self-development, or building skills outside of school are generally absent in family settings. This well-meaning approach can leave young people unprepared for the realities of the labor market. As a result, many graduate without work experience, an entrepreneurial mindset, or personal initiative. The remittances sent by the diaspora has also supported those 'unwilling' to work thereby contributing to the high unemployment figures, but 'it's not that there isn't enough work' (Interview 10). Many young people therefore 'need to take more initiative themselves' to both find jobs and pursue career development (Interview 1).

A number of interviewees noted that because young people can now travel and experience a new way of life 'the menu has been expanded' (Interview 8). Leaving Kosovo was 'not necessarily a bad thing' as it gave them the chance to learn new business skills and experience how culture is produced and promoted abroad, which benefits Kosovo when they return (Interview 4).

Kosovo's Entrepreneurial Culture

It was noted that **Kosovo has a uniquely innovative entrepreneurial culture** characterized by **resilience, initiative, and independence**. Business entrepreneurs are 'taking things into their own hands and getting things done' (Interview 5), while cultural entrepreneurs are 'producing their own things. They're not necessarily waiting for validation...they don't wait for people to tell them can' (Interview 3).

This 'bottom-up' self-reliant approach was credited to the attitude cultivated during the 1990s when the Kosovo Albanian community had to create a parallel system in the face of state oppression. This bred 'an instinct in us to find a way to do things on our own'; while this was advantageous in many ways, it has also meant there is a 'tendency to find a way to finish projects by counting on yourself and your friends' rather than access the grants available domestically and internationally (Interview 9). Most students have said **they would stay in Kosovo if there were more visible opportunities to start or grow a business**, but they believe these opportunities are hard to access or simply don't exist, mainly because they are not promoted or made visible to the public.

There is a pervasive perception that **entrepreneurial careers are 'more risky'** and as a result **'people are looking for jobs in the public sector...because it's safe'** (Interview 5). A practical manifestation of this is that banks are much more willing to provide loans and mortgages to those working in "safe" careers. As a result, 'we're lacking enough entrepreneurs who are brave enough to pursue those paths' (Interview 6). The broader culture reinforces a mindset where failure is feared and trying something new is seen as risky rather than a learning opportunity.

Many entrepreneurs 'lack the knowledge they need' because 'business in Kosovo only really started around 2000; we're still in the learning phase. We haven't reached a level of maturity where we can say we have business expertise passed down across generations' (Interview 6). When Kosovo's entrepreneurs seek to expand regionally, they are competing with others with '30-50 years [experience] in the business' (Interview 10).

Kosovo also lacks a business 'ecosystem', 'an investment culture' and experts to provide advice (Interview 6). It was also noted that the media's focus in Kosovo is overwhelmingly 'on politics...whatever bad things are happening at that very moment' rather than the exciting entrepreneurial initiatives. Kosovo also has no newspaper that focuses only on 'businesses and business opportunities' (Interview 5).

Many criticized Kosovo's education system; too many children in overcrowded classrooms are 'just learning things by heart' and are not encouraged to cultivate an 'entrepreneurship mindset from the get-go' (Interview 5). Likewise, there is insufficient focus on teaching artistic skills and a lack of suitable materials. The system was described as 'not very well organized and not compatible with our needs and the type of work we are doing here' (Interview 8). There is a disconnect between what the education system provides and what the labor market requires. Universities continue to offer outdated curricula, producing graduates with degrees that hold little practical value and limited engagement with new areas such as data science, artificial intelligence, and digital communication. Many noted significant gaps in the curriculum relating in particular to technology, manufacturing, management, sound engineering, lighting design, stage management, art and music. Private institutions try to fill these gaps by offering more innovative programs, but only reach a small portion of the student population.

Due to the lack of a suitable education infrastructure in Kosovo, **entrepreneurs 'have to build the kind of people' required after they are employed** (Interview 10). Individuals have qualifications but 'they're not ready for the actual job role' as practical experience was not part of their education (Interview 6).

Most students are unaware of business opportunities in Kosovo, as entrepreneurship isn't promoted in schools and universities, and success stories remain unseen; more should be done to reach the youth through social media, rather than websites.

Existing Government Support

There was widespread consensus **that the government has not done enough to support entrepreneurs**, most of whom are 'struggling' and not just financially (Interview 3). Entrepreneurial enterprise **'takes a lot of guts and a lot of effort'**, but because entrepreneurs **'have to do pretty much everything by themselves'** they can become demotivated and exhausted (Interview 5). Many potential entrepreneurs feel unsupported and choose to leave in search of better environments.

Some argued that business entrepreneurs are not respected; 'the government doesn't see entrepreneurs as partners...they see as milking cows' (Interview 10). In other countries there was a 'very business-oriented mindset' but in Kosovo 'that's not really the case. It's more like "we're here to tax you"' (Interview 5). The government was too often preoccupied by 'fighting politically' and 'are not focused on business entrepreneurship' (Interview 10). The government's focus is 'all about politics, very little about the economy' and needs to shift to 'a mindset that puts development and businesses first' such as in Estonia (Interview 5).

With respect to culture, until very recently **the government 'didn't invest in that direction at all'**; while they were 'proud' to see local artists succeed, 'it's not that they were supporting it especially' (Interview 8). The government elected in 2021 were, it was argued, better aware of the economic benefits of cultural entrepreneurship and the **Ministry of Culture has invested more which 'is having a good impact in creating opportunities for young people'** (Interview 8). This 'positive shift' has manifested in the allocation of larger and longer grants which 'provide stability and enable you to think more long term' (Interview 7). However, the majority of cultural entrepreneurs stated that there 'are not many spaces' to hold exhibitions, host workshops, rehearse and perform (Interview 9). This was especially apparent in Prishtina where 'the cultural spaces instead of expanding are being reduced' (Interview 8).

A number of interviewees noted that while 'at the top there is some vision' many working within the bureaucracy are not sufficiently skilled and create needless 'obstacles' (Interview 8 & 2). They rarely 'actually engage with what's out there' and are not in tune with the needs of entrepreneurs (Interview 3). **Many in government simply 'don't understand the realities of business and the economy'**. The process for setting up a company in Kosovo was described as 'super ridiculous, it takes so much time' while international businesses that want to invest in Kosovo are also faced with a needlessly complicated legal process (Interview 5). **Public and private sectors in Kosovo are also burdened with rigid HR systems**, making hiring and firing a months-long bureaucratic process. This leads to the retention of underperforming employees and discourages active talent optimization. Furthermore, most companies do not offer internal development paths, leaving ambitious employees without motivation or opportunities for growth. When awarding business grants the Ministry of Trade 'always focus on startups' rather than established companies that have knowledge, experience, and a market (Interview 10).

Likewise, many cultural entrepreneurs noted that **the process of applying for funding is 'arduous'** (Interview 3). The **'very difficult and time consuming'** process could be significantly 'more streamlined' with less paperwork and reorganized so that the funds are distributed for a 12-month period; currently, awards are made in June or July and the money has to be spent by the end of the calendar year (Interview 4). There is additionally a lack of transparency as to who makes decisions on funding and on what basis.

Kosovo's cultural entrepreneurial achievements are being promoted 'independently' by the artists themselves rather than the government (Interview 3). There is thus 'a lot of room for improvement' in terms of the government's promotional activities abroad which should focus on creating more opportunities for [artists] to showcase and travel'. This would 'contribute not only to employment...but to increasing awareness of what is taking place here and promoting a different vision of what Kosovo means' (Interview 7).

Likewise, business entrepreneurs criticized the government's efforts to promote Kosovo's economic achievements and opportunities. There was a need for more **'political recognition locally so that people think that something is happening'** and encourage local investors. It was noted that 'a ton of countries all around the world promote what their country can do for them. And we have nothing like that. So how do you attract companies to come here?' (Interview 5). **To attract foreign investment**, Kosovo must develop **'stronger ties with the outside world'**. The government should copy the model adopted in Albania and appoint **'dedicated people...who actually build long-term relationships between businesses in Kosovo and businesses abroad'**. Entrepreneurial success in Kosovo 'should be promoted globally' (Interview 6).

Recommendations

As noted throughout this report, **outward migration poses a significant threat to Kosovo's future**. Recognizing this, the Government of Kosovo is committed to 'solving [the] long-term socio-economic challenges of the country, which act as drivers of migration' (Republic of Kosovo, 2021, 7).

Our research has shown that Kosovo has a lot to be proud of; despite a very challenging international context, **Kosovo's economy is relatively healthy**; Kosovo boasts a wide range of thriving and exciting entrepreneurial initiatives in both business and culture; **Kosovo's young people are generally enthusiastic** about their country and boast an array of attributes and skills that make them an attractive workforce for both local and foreign employees.

We have also identified, however, that significant challenges and obstacles remain. Addressing these challenges is essential if Kosovo is to reduce outward migration and ensure future prosperity.

Existing Recommendations

Though Kosovo's economy has performed well, it is likely to come under significant pressure in the coming years. Kosovo and the WB6 as a whole remain "buffeted by multiple sources of uncertainty" (World Bank, 2025a, 14).

The IMF warned that 'a slowdown in major European economies,' 'higher trade barriers,' and 'an intensification of geopolitical conflicts' will have the effect of 'disrupting external financing flows, commodity markets, tourism, supply chains, and Foreign Direct Investment... resulting in tighter financial conditions and higher inflation' (2025, 7). Naturally, **should Kosovo's economy falter**, this will lead to an **increase in outward migration**.

A number of national and international studies have made recommendations on how to strengthen Kosovo's economy – and deal with the challenge of outward migration and its associated impact – which have emphasized the need to support entrepreneurship. **The World Bank advised that to boost productivity and achieve long-term growth, Kosovo must create 'a more conducive environment for private sector development'** (World Bank, 2025a, 85).

Speaking in Prishtina in January 2025, the Deputy Manager of the World Bank for Kosovo suggested that Kosovo must **'transition to a model of competitive economic growth that creates more and higher quality jobs for all the people of Kosovo.'** She advised that Kosovo move to **'a more competitive economic growth model' involving 'the transition from a consumption-based economy to one that is more focused on manufacturing and innovation, supported by higher exports and a more diversified manufacturing base'** (Telegrafi, 2025).

The IMF likewise recommended that Kosovo **'shift from remittance-financed, consumption-driven growth to a competitive export-oriented alternative, backed by investment in productive capacity and human capital'** (2025, 46).

The OECD recommended that Kosovo – and indeed all the WB6 – 'further improve the business environment to stimulate entrepreneurship and attract investments for job creation.' They also suggested that, to **'reduce skills mismatches and ease the school-to-work transition,'** Kosovo should 'extend skills anticipation systems to guide young people, adult workers and the unemployed in retraining and upskilling activities, and to better foresee skills shortages' (OECD, 2022, 15).

The EU Commission noted that many 'obstacles' continued to impede entrepreneurs, noting in particular that 'access to finance remains a barrier for the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises' (2024, 74–75).

It is therefore clear that encouraging entrepreneurship is central to protecting Kosovo from both future economic decline and increased outward migration.

Recommendations

Based on the research conducted, we advance the following key recommendations:

Education

- **The school curriculum** should be significantly **revised and updated** to ensure young people learn the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the modern workplace.

- **Schools and universities** should include a more practical dimension in the curriculum so that young people can learn skills through **education and internships to prepare them for employment** and encourage entrepreneurship.
- **Gaps relating to specific industry skills should be addressed**, and business and cultural entrepreneurs should be involved in identifying and addressing these gaps.

Societal Attitudes

- The government should encourage entrepreneurship across society, **challenge negative attitudes** – especially within the banking sector – towards both **innovation and risk-taking**, and foster a more vibrant investment culture.
- The people of Kosovo should be **encouraged to adopt a different approach to employment and entrepreneurship**, one which encourages ambition and innovation.
- The government should **counter the perception that working abroad ensures better wages and career prospects** by highlighting the negative aspects of migration – **especially the higher cost of living abroad** – and the better opportunities for career progression available in Kosovo.

Government Support

- The government **must focus less on political infighting** and **more on supporting entrepreneurs** for the betterment of Kosovo and encourage the national media to do the same.
- The government should **undertake a study to identify best practice principles** applied in other countries and work to implement similar measures in Kosovo.
- The government should provide **more financial support to cultural and business entrepreneurs** – such as **tax exemptions, funding schemes, and low-interest loans** – and also do more to promote existing schemes.
- The government should **initiate financial reform** – in consultation with business leaders – aimed at supporting businesses; these should focus on redressing high taxation, high bank interest rates for investment loans, VAT collection at the time of import prior to product sales, complicated employment laws, and a lack of energy infrastructure.
- Government **funding schemes for both cultural and business entrepreneurs** should be made less bureaucratic, more streamlined and involve much greater active engagement with entrepreneurs to better understand their needs and working conditions.
- The government should allocate **more funding for training and mentorship schemes** for entrepreneurs, create more dedicated innovation parks, and work towards developing an ecosystem within Kosovo that supports entrepreneurs.
- The government should provide **more spaces – rooms, buildings etc.** – for cultural entrepreneurs to hold exhibitions, host workshops, rehearse and perform, create a specialized funding pool for spaces, and establish a studio residency scheme for artists.
- The government should enhance efforts **to secure foreign investment in Kosovo**, simplify the process of setting up businesses in Kosovo, and make it easier for Kosovo's diaspora to invest in entrepreneurship in Kosovo.

Promotion

- Kosovo's cultural and business **entrepreneurial achievements and opportunities should be promoted in schools** to inspire the youth to stay in Kosovo.

- The government should invest significantly **more time and money to promote Kosovo's** cultural and business entrepreneurial achievements and opportunities internationally to increase foreign investment and boost Kosovo's international reputation.
- **External promotion must involve leveraging Kosovo's embassies abroad and its large diaspora;** both can play a key role in increasing international awareness of the cultural and business opportunities in Kosovo and simultaneously increase Kosovo's "soft power".
- The government should do more to **establish exchange residencies for cultural and business entrepreneurs** to improve international engagement with Kosovo and enable Kosovo's entrepreneurs to gain valuable skills and experiences abroad.

If Kosovo is to maintain healthy economic growth and reduce youth migration, it must support entrepreneurship; we believe the implementation of these recommendations will achieve this goal.

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Interviews

Interview 1

Aziz Peja
(Managing Director at Royal Medical Hospital)
20th March 2025

Interview 3

Aulone Kadriu
(Kosovo 2.0)
9th April 2025

Interview 5

Arben Zeqiri
(Vice President at Radix)
17th April 2025

Interview 7

Ajete Kerqeli
(Co-founder and Development Manager of Foundation 17)
22nd April 2025

Interview 9

Tomor Kuci
(Musician/Audio Production Lecturer)
25th April 2025

Interview 2

Xhevdet Rexhepi
(Founder and CEO at Viva Fresh)
8th April 2025

Interview 4

Artrit Bytyci
(Founder of StoryLab)
9th April 2025

Interview 6

Hana Qerimi
(CEO at StarLabs and Shkolla Digjitale)
17th April 2025

Interview 8

Jeton Neziraj
(Director of Qendra Multimedia)
24th April 2025

Interview 10

Kujtim Gjevori
(CEO at SCAMPA/Managing Partner at Powerpack Kosovo LLC)
15th May 2025

Workshops

28th May, 2025, Hotel Sirius, Prishtina

Ylber Havolli (Defy Them)
Luzim Hoti (7Arte)
Gani Jakupi (GRAN Fest)

29th May, 2025, Hotel Sirius, Prishtina

Shqipe Abazi (CINTANA-ASU ALLIANCE)
Valton Ajeti (Eurosig)
Zanfina Raja (Myelin OPS)
Hana Bacaj (UBO Consulting)
Kosovare Alaj Bajrami (ISA Consulting Group)
Genc Buca (Lura Agroturizem)
Blendrit Elezaj (Tactica)
Besa Gjonbalaj Gashi (Rrota)
Arita Panxha (Chester Group)
Kushtrim Puka (Promnestria)

Fisnik Pula (Mikkena)
Muavi Rexhepi (Borek)
Alban Sahiti (Tenton)
Gent Shala (GS Consulting)
Arian Vranica (Oda Ekonomike)
Arben Zeqiri (Radix)
Besim Gerguri (UKAlbanians.net)
Leart Zogjani (SKINS Agency)
Zana Tabaku (Appdec)

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