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# Kosovo's Migration Dynamics:

*Implications for Democracy  
and Political Participation*

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# **Kosovo's Migration Dynamics:**

**Implications for Democracy and  
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# Introduction

Numerous studies and reports have analyzed the impact of migration on economic issues in Kosovo. Remittances have been a prime focus. This report aims to explore the potential impact of migration on socio-political attitudes in Kosovo, with a focus on political participation and democracy, while acknowledging certain feasibility constraints. Migration has long influenced political behavior, attitudes, and engagement both in home and host countries, but the effects remain context-specific. The existing literature presented in this report examines how migration may influence socio-political beliefs in the home country, among other factors. The case of Kosovo – a country with significant migration waves and an active diaspora – offers a mixed picture, though some concrete patterns emerge. While anecdotal evidence suggests Kosovo’s diaspora has a notable influence on domestic politics, systematic research and empirical data remain sparse. This report seeks to shed some light on the nexus between migration, and political behavior in Kosovo, contextualizing it within broader trends and existing scholarship.

The literature emphasizes migration’s potential to instigate positive political and institutional changes in home countries. Several arguments are presented that migration from developing countries to more democratic host countries enhances institutional quality and economic freedoms back home. Migrants exposed to democratic norms often return with new political perspectives, advocating for such values in their home countries. However, these effects are not universal and are often contingent on the specific context, including the nature of migration and the host countries’ characteristics. The first section of the report presents a brief overview of the existing general knowledge from the literature while focusing on the specific aspects of political participation and democratization. Next, the report presents the most up-to-date data on migratory patterns from Kosovo, with a particular focus on the past decade. The report continues by presenting the general data on diaspora participation in home country politics. Most importantly, the report narrows down the focus on the potential impact that Kosovo’s migration might have on the political participation, behavior, and opinions in the home country. The report attempts to synthesize the findings and provide preliminary implications and hypotheses.

The following preliminary conclusions can be outlined in the present report:

- On average, there have been around 53,000 immigrants per year from Kosovo between 2012 and 2021; however, there has also been a wave of those who have (potentially) returned. The average yearly net immigration of Kosovo’s population has been at around 35,000 per year between 2012 and 2021.
- Over the past decade, the older population has replaced the younger population in terms of migration numbers. The share of those over 30 years old migrating from Kosovo has overtaken the share of those below 19 years of age.
- Employment, as a reason for migration, has overtaken migrating because of family over the past decade. Fewer people from Kosovo have migrated for family reasons, and more have done so for employment reasons in the past decade. Such a switch is not without implications for politics at home, which the report attempts to highlight. Migration for employment purposes, compared to other forms such as family migration, often keeps migrants more closely connected to the politics of their home country, which in turn has additional implications. There has been a significant increase in voter participation among Kosovo migrants in recent years. There is no credible objective explanation for Kosovo’s migrants’ sudden increase in participation in voting in the past election cycles. Hints from literature suggest political party campaigning and intent for regime change as potential motivations.
- There is an evident association between families having migrant family members and the heightened belief that participation in elections (voting) can make a change compared to families that have no family member abroad. This indicates that those who move abroad may influence both the opinion and behavior of those in their home country.

- When it comes to utmost socio-political concerns, Kosovo citizens who have family members abroad show more concern for education and unemployment at home than those with no family members abroad. This can indicate a bi-directional causality regarding opinion, in that either those who migrate have education and unemployment as a primary concern, or the other way around: they might have left for the same reasons and thus influence the opinion at home. The present study cannot confirm the direction.
- Regarding other socio-political issues, such as environment, gender violence, or similar matters, there is either no difference in opinion or there is more concern shown by those who have no family members abroad, which adds to the mixed picture of the migration effect or rather association on socio-political beliefs in the home country.
- Interestingly, when it comes to various indicators of democracy, Kosovo citizens with family members abroad have a much more positive opinion on Kosovo's democratization process than those with no family members abroad. Frequent contact with migrants, either in the form of family members or friendships, provide "reality check-ins" in comparison between the situation at home and abroad. Moreover, remittances can serve as stabilizers for those at home, which may forgo potential instability factors that those who have no family members abroad may be more exposed to.

# Methodology

An ideal methodological approach to examine the potential effects of a migrant community on the socio-political beliefs, behavior, and political participation of the home country population would involve adopting a multi-pronged approach. First, several sets of surveys of representative (i) samples of the home country population and (ii) samples of migration communities of the main destination countries would have to be carried out in order to gauge the main demographic and belief factors that may be linked. Second, qualitative interviews would have to be carried out with a (i) sample of home country households that have at least one individual migrant abroad; and samples of migrant communities in main destination countries. Interviews would be ideal for capturing the potential in-depth effects of migration on the home country's population. Lastly, content analysis of social media accounts of migrant communities during political campaigning in the home country would enable to capture the association between political parties and the migrant community's reactions.

For the present report, a scaled-down approach has been adopted, as the breadth and depth of the above-mentioned comprehensive analysis would require resources and time beyond the scope of this study. The analysis of the report is primarily based on desk research which includes:

- (i) A focused secondary literature review on the potential associations between migrant communities and the home country population's political behavior. In addition to broader theoretical studies, the report aimed to resort to studies focusing on southeastern and eastern European migrants and their respective home country politics;
- (ii) Triangulation of the following datasets
  - a Eurostat's Emigration by age group, sex, and citizenship (Eurostat 2024a), Immigration by age group, sex, and citizenship (Eurostat 2024c), and First permits by reason, length of validity, and citizenship (Eurostat 2024b). The three datasets offered a valuable opportunity to offset the lack of up-to-date migration data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS).<sup>1</sup> The Eurostat datasets include information on both emigration and immigration providing the prospect to showcase not only the immigration data from Kosovo but also the net migration, as not all of those who emigrate stay in the receiving countries. The temporal coverage of the Eurostat data presented in this report includes the decade between 2012 and 2021
  - b United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Public Pulse (see UNDP 2024a) yearly datasets helped retrieve some potential associations between Kosovo households with family members abroad and their beliefs about relevant socio-political issues such as education, healthcare, poverty, unemployment, the environment, and taxation, amongst others. The Eurostat data presented in this report covers the period from 2019 to 2021, aligning with the years in which these issues were highlighted in UNDP's Public Pulse annual questionnaires.
  - c Kosovo's Central Election Commission (CEC 2024) data on voter participation according to polling stations, primarily those voting in person and via post.

<sup>1</sup> The KAS finished the collection of census data in Summer 2024; however, the data were not available for public at the time of the present report's writing.



# Clues from existing literature

The literature on diaspora and political behavior, to the current extent, explores the impact of migration on democratic practices, political attitudes, and behaviors both in the home and host countries. While there is evidence suggesting significant effects of migration on political behavior, existing findings are mixed and context-dependent.

Migration often fosters positive democratic developments in migrants' home countries. Docquier et al. (2016) argue that migration from developing countries to highly democratic nations improves institutional quality and economic freedoms in the migrants' countries of origin. Migrants that are exposed to democratic norms can return and thus promote such practices domestically. However, these effects are largely context-specific, and while this generalization holds broadly, the variable of democratic exposure is a constant for Kosovo migrants, for the overwhelming majority of them migrate to democratic countries. Thus, any variation in the outcome of political behavior at home cannot be explained by the regime type of the host country.

The diaspora is considered a vector for transmitting democratic norms and values from host to home countries. Wilson (1995) and Ragazzi (2009) have documented this phenomenon, though the strength of such effects varies. For Kosovo, there is only light support for this finding. The indirect influence of Kosovo's diaspora on home-country politics remains limited, but anecdotal evidence suggests value transmission might still occur. The effects of migration differ based on its nature. Temporary migrants, especially those traveling for work, tend to maintain stronger ties with their home countries, returning more frequently and potentially influencing local politics (Haas 2005). However, empirical data on Kosovo does not yet fully confirm this distinction due to insufficient longitudinal studies on its migrants; it does, nonetheless, point in this very direction. Additionally, the post-visa liberalization regime's impact on temporary migration patterns remains unexplored – due to its recent occurrence, leaving questions about the potential for political influence.

Several studies document shifts in political values among migrants over time. Surely, they do not capture them based on the reasons for migration. For instance, McMahon et al. (1992) highlight value changes resulting from internal migration, while Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) show that return migrants (i.e., in Mexico) often develop more democratic attitudes than non-migrants. Similarly, studies on Latin American migrants in the U.S. highlight the trend when it comes to the migratory effects on local diffusion (Levitt 1998). However, Bădescu (2004), examining Romanian migrants, found no significant differences in political

culture between migrants and non-migrants. This divergence highlights the conditional nature of migration's effects on political values. Kosovo-specific data on return migrants remain scarce, but anecdotal evidence suggests potential for similar shifts.

It has also been suggested that migration improves the material and cognitive conditions of individuals, contributing to shifts in political attitudes and behaviors. Better economic status and increased knowledge are identified as key determinants of political attitudes (Careja and Emmenegger). This is particularly relevant for Kosovo, where migrants who have experienced functional administrative and justice systems abroad may develop new perspectives on governance and politics. Bălătescu (2007) emphasizes that exposure to better-functioning systems abroad enables migrants to critically compare home and host countries, influencing their attitudes toward domestic political institutions. This cognitive improvement is considered a significant mechanism behind changes in political behavior.

Careja and Emmenegger (2012) explore whether migrants returning from democratic countries exhibit different political orientations compared to non-migrants. They find that migrants returning from established democracies tend to trust international institutions more and show a higher interest in international politics. However, migration experience has minimal impact on trust in national governments or participation in domestic elections – an assumption that the findings of this report on Kosovo's case challenge to some extent. Importantly, Careja and Emmenegger (2012) conceptualize migration-induced changes in political attitudes as a form of cognitive personal improvement. Exposure to new political systems, societal norms, and governance structures enhances migrants' knowledge and self-perception, influencing their political attitudes. Migrants exposed to established democracies are more likely to trust international institutions, participate in European Parliament elections, and express interest in international politics.

In sum, the literature highlights the varying relationship between migration, diaspora, and political behavior in home countries. It appears, that while migration often promotes democratic attitudes and practices, its effects are contingent on factors such as the type of migration, host-country characteristics, and the nature of migrant engagement. For Kosovo, the diaspora plays a significant role in shaping political dynamics, yet systematic evidence remains sparse. The present report attempts to shed some light to the issue.

# Migration overview

## General trends

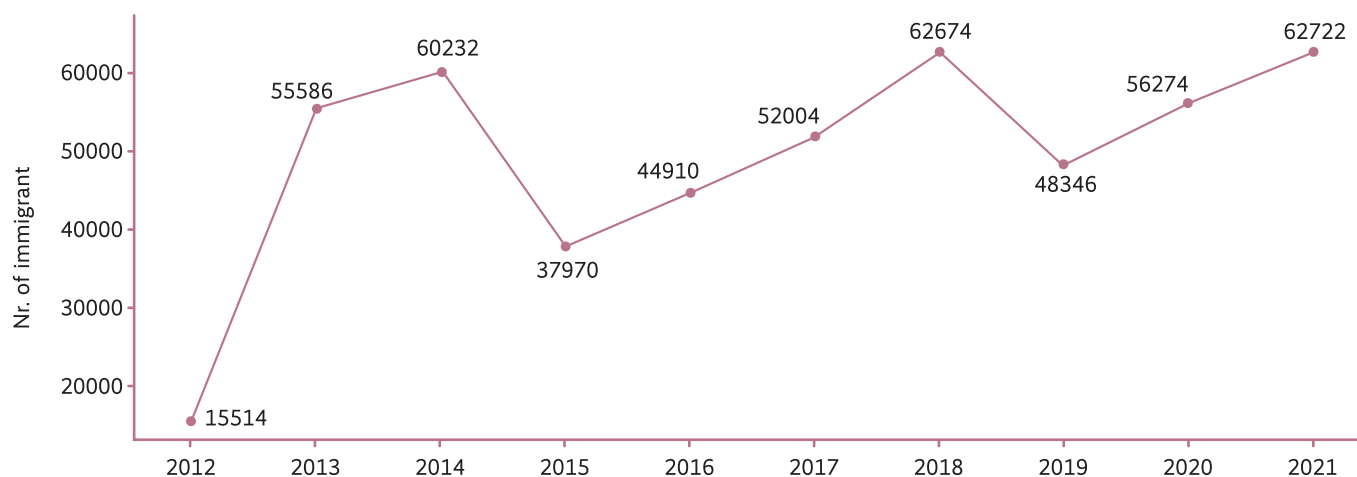
Kosovo has seen various migration waves marked by different reasons for migration ever since the 1960s when more reliable data began to emerge (see Blazhevaska 2017). Immigration of the population from Kosovo continued after the 1998-1999 war; however, the highest spike in migration ever since the war ended was marked after 2012 – a period which some have dubbed as a “massive exodus” of the Kosovo population (Garcia 2021). According to several people interviewed by the BBC about the topic in Kosovo back in 2015, they stated that “[i]t’s sad that this [emigration] is happening, but it is not [people’s] fault; they’re just looking for a better life” (BBC News 2015, n.p.). Others commented that their reason for planning to migrate is that “[i]n any prison, if you found an open window you’d escape - just to see something else and experience freedom” (BBC News 2015, n.p.). The significant wave of emigration from Kosovo, which peaked a decade ago, was largely driven by people’s desire for better and safer job opportunities. (BBC News 2015). Speculative numbers of those who left the

country began to emerge at the same time. According to Ott (2015) of Al Jazeera, it was alleged that only in the first quarter of 2015 there were about 100,000 people who fled the country. It was also suggested that people are leaving because of the “rumours of a better life abroad” (Ott 2015).

Regardless of the initial speculations, the latest Eurostat data (2024c) confirm a significant spike in emigration from Kosovo beginning in 2013, with 55,586 emigrants recorded compared to 15,514 in 2012—an increase of more than threefold within a year. (see Figure 1). Eurostat data on Kosovo primarily tracks migration to the EU, EEA, and Switzerland. It does not cover migration to countries like the UK or the US. From 2013 to 2021, an average of 53,000 Kosovars migrated annually, with a low of 38,000 in 2015 and a peak of 62,500 in 2021. In the past decade (2012 – 2021), there have been over half a million immigrants from Kosovo who settled in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

## Nr. of immigrants from Kosovo to Europe<sup>3</sup> (2012-2021)<sup>4</sup>

Fig. 1



However, a closer look at further Eurostat data, such as those registering the emigration of Kosovo’s population from Europe (see Eurostat 2024a), reveals a fuller migration picture. As Figure 2 shows: since 2012 there have been

an average of 53,000 immigrants per year from Kosovo. However, on average, more than 15,000 emigrants from Kosovo have also relocated from their initial settlements in European states each year. The highest number of those

<sup>2</sup> Note: “Europe” here loosely refers to Eurostat’s geographic locations (geo) from which they attempt to gather data. These include namely: AT, BE, BG, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GE, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MD, ME, MK, NL, NO, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR, UK, BA, KG, RU, BY, CY, US, FR, EL, MT, PT, UA, AM, AZ, SM, TJ, UZ. For more information on the expanded meaning of the above country codes see European Commission (2024). Data on Kosovo’s immigration largely include those from EU, EEA, and CH with some very recent updates on including data from TR as well, for instance.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 3 on what “Europe” refers to.

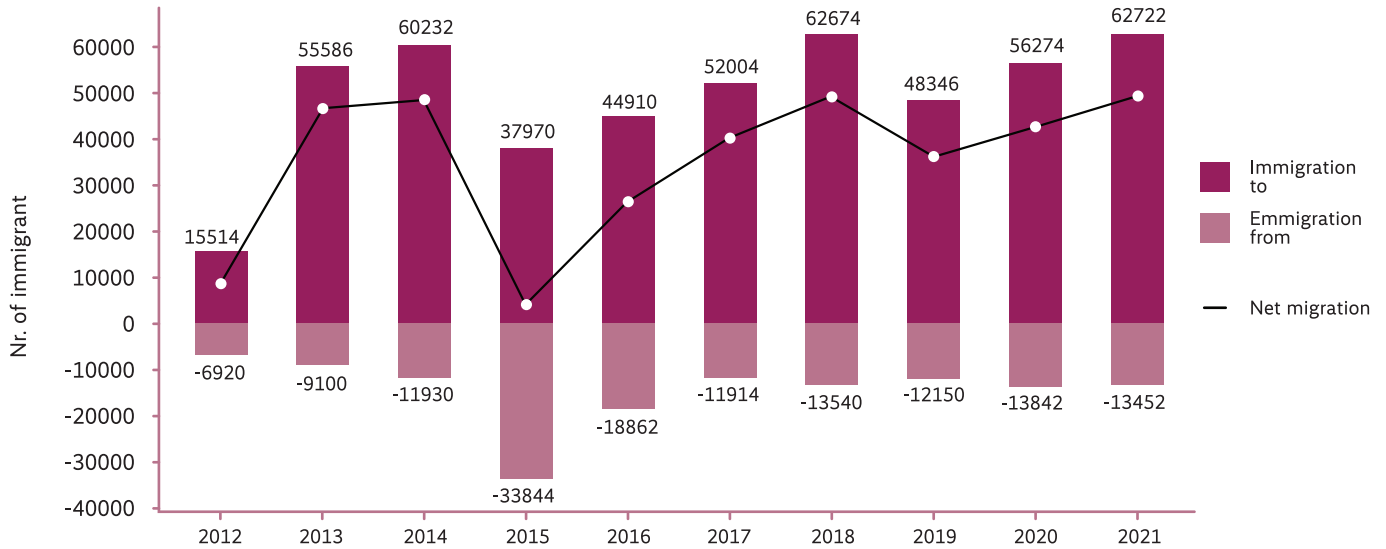
<sup>4</sup> Years here refer to as per Eurostat’s definition, which means that the period/year is the “reference period for migration flows data [in] the calendar year in which the migration occurred” (Eurostat 2024d). Moreover, “Migration data refer to the amount of immigration and emigration that occurred during the reference period of one calendar year T-1 from 1 January until 31 December of year T-1” (Eurostat 2024d).

who left their initial residence in one of the registered European states was in 2015, with the number being close to 34,000 in that single year. Therefore, the average yearly net

immigration of Kosovo's population has been around 35,000 since 2012, with a total number being slightly above 350,000 in the decade between 2012 and 2021.

Fig. 2

### Net immigration from Kosovo to Europe<sup>5</sup> (2012-2021)<sup>6</sup>

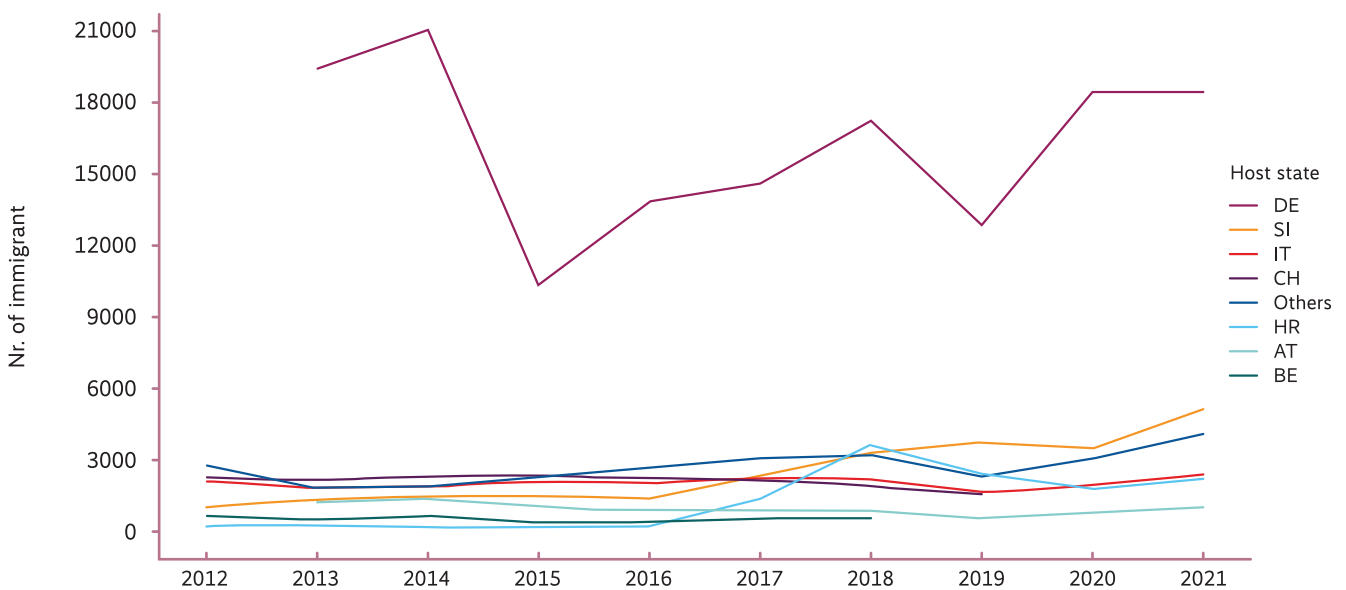


When it comes to the European states where Kosovo's population immigrated, Germany stands out as the largest receiver. Figure 3 presents the top 7 receivers of Kosovo's immigrants. While on average there have been around 3,000

immigrants to the other top 7 receivers, Germany has received on average around 15,000 Kosovo migrants per year, followed by Slovenia, Italy, and Switzerland.

Fig. 3

### Kosovo's immigrants according to receiving countries



<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3 on what "Europe" refers to.  
<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5 on what "years" refers to.

However, not all immigrants from Kosovo stay in the places where they initially migrated. For instance, while Belgium is among the top 7 receivers of Kosovo migrants, there is a higher number of Kosovo citizens who emigrated away from Belgium than those who immigrated to Belgium - at least in the past decade (see Figure 4). Thus, net migration to Belgium is negative amongst Kosovo citizens. While the other top 7 receiving states have a positive net migration of Kosovo citizens, not all fare equally in main-

taining Kosovo immigrants. For instance, despite receiving about two thousand immigrants per year, Croatia sees around half of them leaving Croatia each year, while a quarter who migrate to Slovenia, likewise, leave the latter. Germany and Switzerland are the two Kosovo immigrant-receiving states that retain most of the migrants - with the exception of the year 2015, when Germany had a negative net migration from Kosovo.

Fig. 4

### Kosovo's net migration according to (top 7) receiving countries

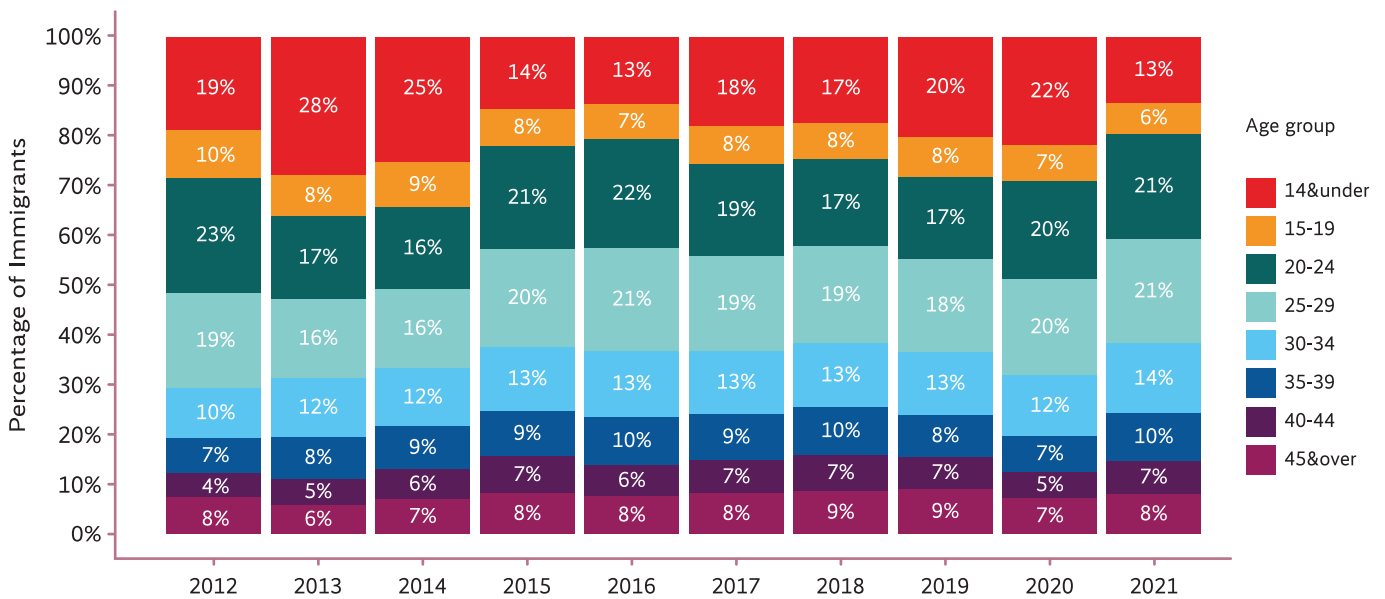


### Trends by age group

In terms of age groups, there is a clear, albeit slight, shift in trends over the past decade when it comes to Kosovo migrants. The strongest shifting trend in the past decade is that the share of migrants under 19 years of age is being taken over by those above 30 years of age. For instance, in the initial years of past decades (2012 – 2014), Kosovo migrants under the age of 19 represented around a third of the total share of migrants from Kosovo. In 2013, this age group represented a 36 percent of the total share of migrants. The most recent years have seen a steady decrease in the under-19 age group of migrants from Kosovo. For instance, in 2021 the aforementioned age group represented about a fifth of the share of total migrants from Kosovo. These temporal trends flip when considering the migrant population above 30 years of age. The latter age group in

the initial period of the last decade (2012-2014) represented around a third of the migrant population from Kosovo, while the more recent numbers (i.e., in 2021) show that they represent close to 40 percent share of the total migrants from Kosovo. Figure 5 shows the overall temporal overview of migrants according to their age group. The most consistent/stable age group of migrants in terms of the share of migrants were those between 20 to 29 years of age representing consistently around 40 percent share of the total migrants from Kosovo over the past decade. Such a shift in age group among migrants is consistent with the shift in reasons for migration, namely that Kosovo migrants are increasingly emigrating for employment reasons – as discussed further in the next subsection.

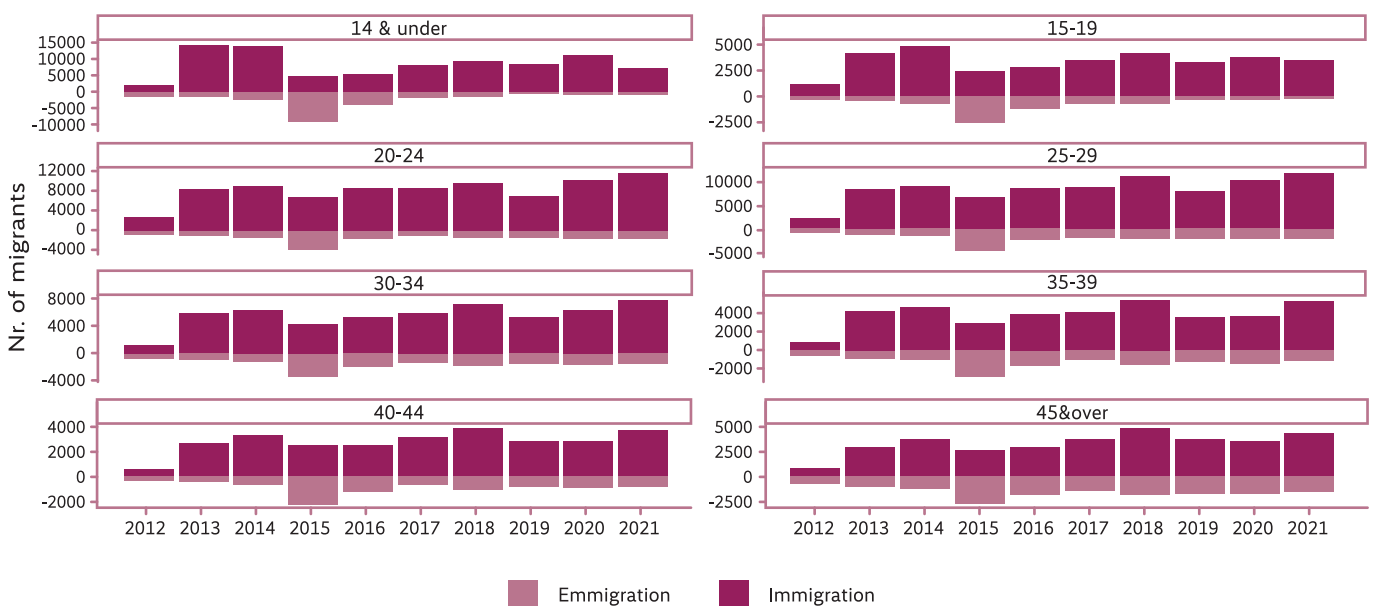
### Kosovo's immigration according to age groups



When it comes to net migration of various age groups, Figure 6 and Figure 7 below reveal the following trends. In 2015, which saw the highest level of secondary migration (where individuals moved away from their initial place of settlement), all age groups emigrated at similar rates. However, the largest proportion consisted of those aged 14 or younger, with around 60% not remaining in their original place of residence in Europe. The most persistent group to continue staying in 2015 was the 20-25 age group. Beyond 2015, the trends of those who migrate but do not continue to stay in their initial residence in Europe vary according to

age group. A quick scan of both of the figures below suggests that: the older the migrating population is, the more likely they are to leave their new migratory place of residence. Figure 7 speaks more clearly about these trends. Overall, and across the years of the past decade, there is a clear correlation between the age of the migratory population and their emigration from the initial place of settlement. Only around 5-7 percent of those under the age of 19 emigrate away from Europe, compared to around 25-30 percent of those 45 years of age or older.

### Kosovo's immigration according to age groups



## Share of Kosovo's net migration according to age group

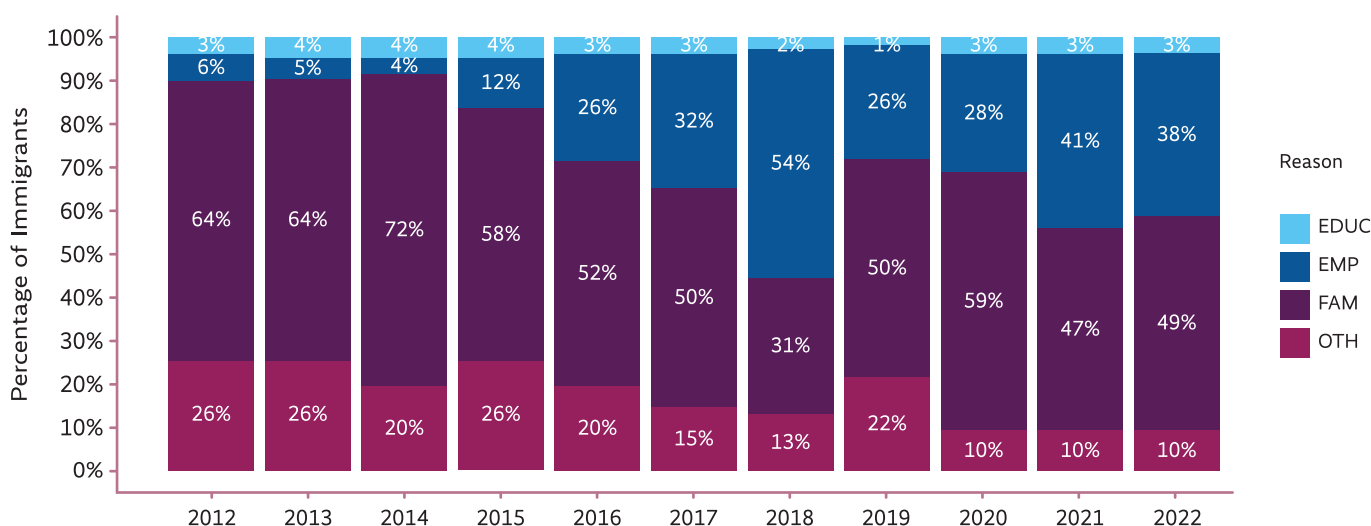


### Trends by reason

Much like the shifting migratory patterns according to age groups, there are some clear shifting patterns when it comes to the reasons why Kosovo citizens immigrate to Europe. Migration for family reasons decreased consistently in the past decade. In the initial period of the past decade (2012-2014) over two-thirds migrated for family reasons. However, examining the more recent period, i.e., in 2021, only slightly above a third of the Kosovo citizens migrated due to family reasons. Employment reasons replaced previous migration drivers, increasing from just around 5% in the early years of the past decade (2012–2014) to over one-third of migrants citing employment as

their primary reason for migration. The reason for education remained the same throughout the past decade, which suggests that those migrating for educational purposes may not account for any potential change in voting behavior or impact on the home country population. Interestingly, the increase in the share of migrants leaving for employment purposes predates the liberalization of movement (visa liberalization) for Kosovo citizens that took place on January 1, 2024. The largest share of migrants for employment reasons was in 2019 where over 50 percent of migrants were recorded to have migrated for employment purposes.

## Share of Kosovo immigrants according to reason of migration



Several implications can be drawn from the stated evidence and the existing knowledge in the literature. To begin with, those who migrate for employment reasons, as opposed to those who migrate for family reasons (i.e., family unification) appear to maintain tighter bonds with the home country, with some likelihood of influencing politics at home (Haas 2005). For instance, Kapur (2014) suggests that those who migrate for employment reasons, broadly speaking, tend to have more concrete plans to return and maintain professional connections with their home country. Relatedly, Rother (2016) suggests that those who migrate for employment reasons engage more often in what is suggested to be “circular migration” – those who move back and forth from and to home and host countries.

The impact that such migrants can have on the home country’s politics and the democratization processes is a two-pronged one. On the one hand, the quality of migrants’ home country politics depends on the type of regime of the migrants’ host countries. If migrants’ host countries are democratic, such as is the case with Kosovo migrants, Kosovo “circular” migrants start to develop expectations and reality-checks from their back-and-forth movement from and to their home and host countries (Rother 2016). Those who migrate for employment reasons are, therefore, more likely to actively engage with and advocate for democratic practices learned in their host coun-

tries. Additionally, Maydom (2017, n.p.) finds that “financial remittances from democratic countries are accompanied by and reinforce the transmission of social remittances in the form of pro-democratic political norms”.

On the other hand, the implications cannot be isolated from the broader illiberal trends in Europe and beyond where Kosovo citizens tend to migrate. By way of the same mechanism through which home countries can benefit in their democratization practices through the value acquisition and transmission of migrants living in their respective democratic host countries, so can their values eventually change, as Auer and Schaub (2024) warn, should their host countries become less democratic and thus more illiberal. They also issue another warning out of their longitudinal study of 430,000 individuals from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) by showing that the CEE migrants usually hold more liberal values than non-migrants; thus, their exit may deteriorate democracy in their home countries. No longitudinal data exists on the beliefs and ideologies of the Kosovo migrants and non-migrants. However, given that Kosovo’s political party system and organization do not follow the standard divides in Europe or CEE countries of left or right, liberal or illiberal, populist or not populist, it is difficult to say whether such latter trends in Europe or elsewhere where Kosovo migrants choose to be located clearly may follow in Kosovo.

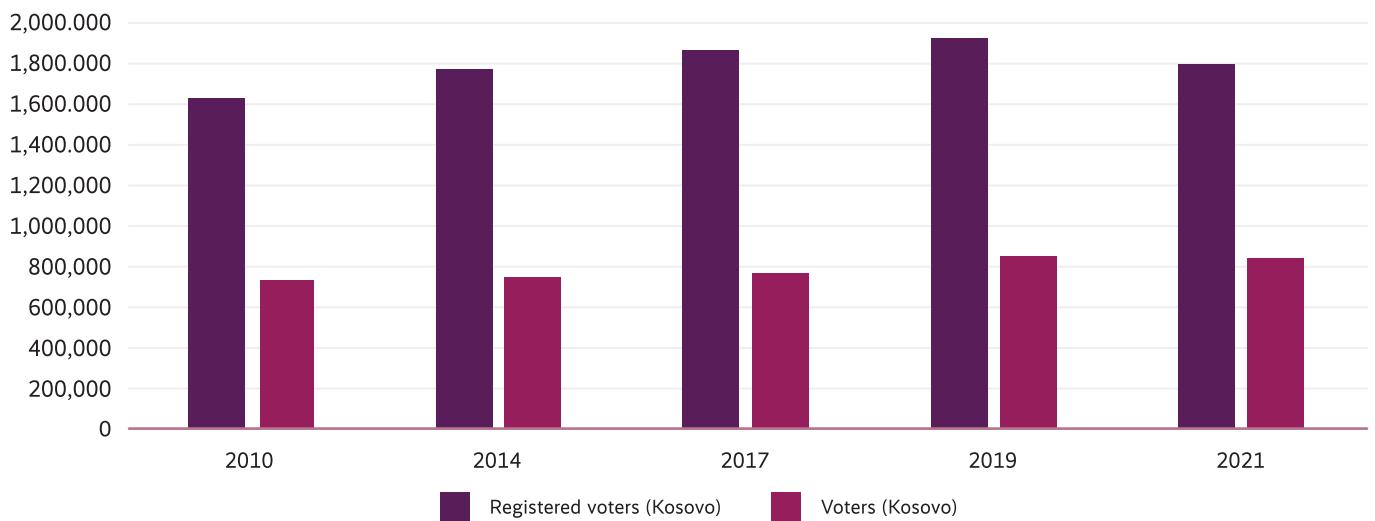
# Participation in home country elections

When it comes to voting patterns in Kosovo (without the migrant community's participation), there is a stable trend. According to temporal records of the Kosovo Central Election Commission (CEC 2024), overall, there is a slight decrease in registered voters in Kosovo, but the number of those who vote is more stable with a slight increase over

the years, sitting at around 800,000 in total of those who vote considering the last three election periods (see Figure 9). In other words, in the past decade (2010 – 2021), the ratio between registered and actual voters swung between 0.41 (in 2017) to 0.47 (in 2021).

*Registered vs. actual voters in Kosovo (w/o Diaspora)*

Fig. 9

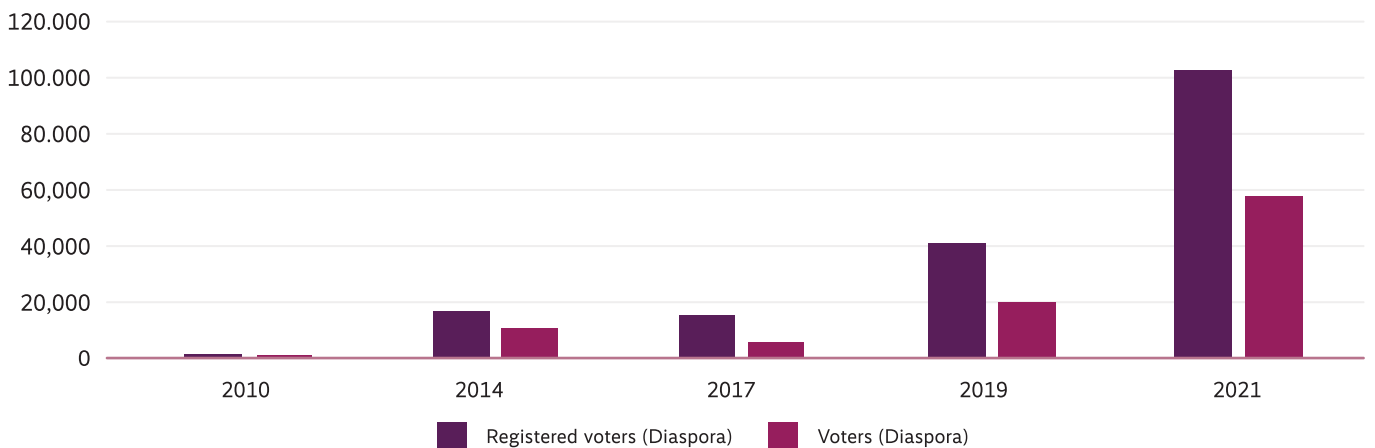


Voter participation from abroad has steadily increased, both in registration and actual turnout. In 2010, there were slightly more than 1,600 of those who have registered to

vote from abroad, whereas these numbers grew around sixty-five-fold in 2021 raising the number to over 102,000 registered voters (see Figure 10).

*Registered vs. actual voters from Diaspora (w/o Kosovo)*

Fig. 10



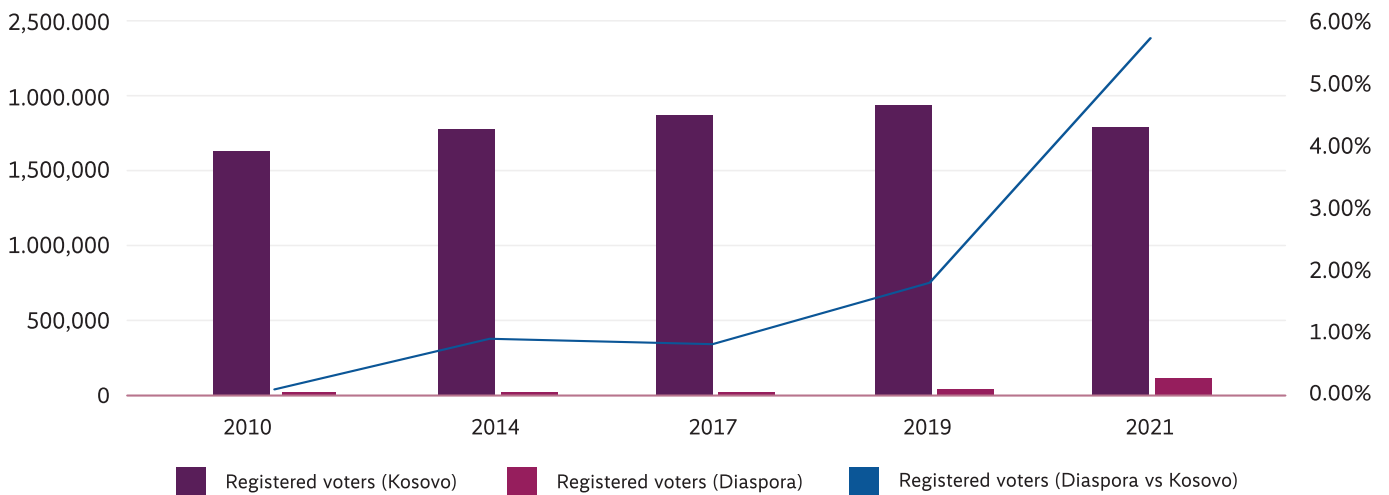


The trend follows the overall migratory trends; however, the migratory trends cannot explain the sudden increase in the past two election cycles, both in terms of those who are registered and those who vote from abroad. A particular attention to be drawn here is in the below two graphs (Figure 11 and Figure 12). They show that the percentage

of Kosovo migrant voters vis-à-vis home voters has increased tremendously. The share of registered voters from the Diaspora as opposed to those at home in 2010 was a tenth of one percent, whereas in 2021 it was over five percent. When it comes to voters the same shares are 0.14 percent in 2010 and 6.7 percent in 2021.

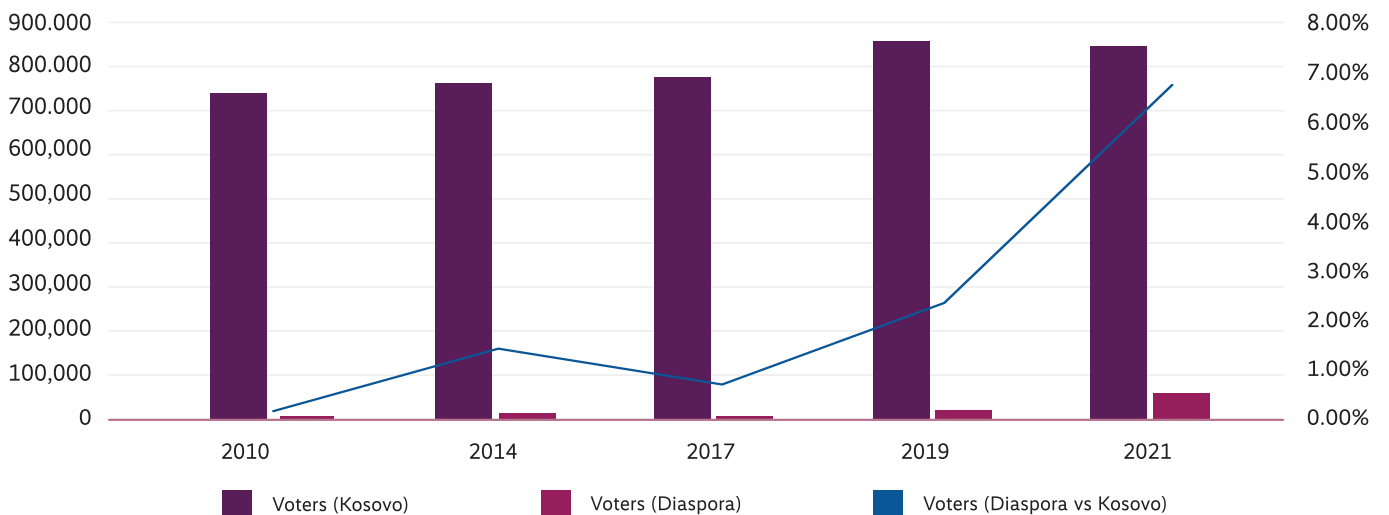
### Registered voters (Diaspora vs Kosovo)

Fig. 11



### Voters from Diaspora and Kosovo (vs)

Fig. 12



Several studies have examined how states adopt different legislative practices in encouraging or discouraging the participation of migrants in their home country's electoral politics. Lafleur's (2014) study is primarily concerned with grasping why is it that different states adopt different policies for migrant populations participating in voting in home country elections. For instance, although both Mexico and Italy allow out of country voting, the results from

both these cases have been mixed. In Italy, there has been a high voter turnout from the migratory population, compared to Mexico where a very limited number of migrants voted (Lafleur 2014). Mexico turns out to have adopted a far more bureaucratically cumbersome process than Italy. Why is this the case still remains a puzzle. Lafleur (2014) identifies the following reasons for enabling or disabling migrant population participation in voting for the home

country elections: (i) emigrant lobbying; (ii) home-state dependence on remittances; (iii) home country desire to use emigrants as resources in the global economy; (iv) regime transformation in the home country; and (v) the electoral interests of domestic political parties.

However, as shown by the evidence above, the migrants' participation in Kosovo's election in 2021, meaning the enormous increase in their participation, cannot be convincingly explained by most of Lafleur's (2014) expectations. To begin with, there have been no major legal changes in recent years in terms of how Kosovo migrants can vote to explain the sudden increasing trends in the 2021 elections. There are still major bureaucratic obstacles (Germin 2021; Dahsyla 2021). Surely, some minor changes occurred in 2017 (Dahsyla 2021), but changes could hardly

explain the instant increase in migratory interest in political participation in the home state.

When it comes to Kosovo families' dependence on remittances, there has been no change whatsoever in the past decade up to the most recent period – i.e., Kosovo families depend on remittances as much as they did back in 2010 (see UNDP 2024b). When it comes to (i) emigrant lobbying and (v) electoral interests of domestic political parties – such factors may play some role, as there appears to be an increase in political parties' lobbying among Kosovo migrants abroad. The latter speaks closer to Ostergaard-Nielsen's (2002) study which suggests that instances of organized Diaspora networks and home-country party outreach and political events may play a role in the increase of political participation.

# Migration and attitudes in the home state

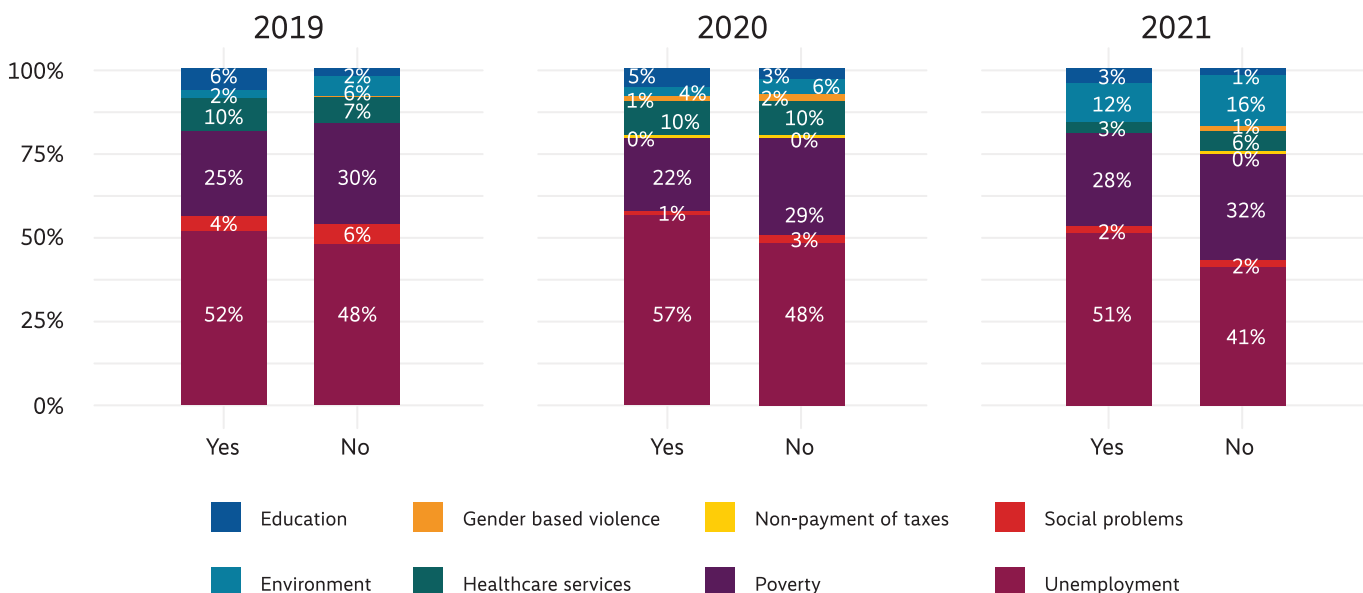
The following section takes the data from UNDP's (2024a) Public Pulse to capture attitudes on various socio-political issues between those who have immediate family migrant members abroad and those who do not. This study aims to assess the extent to which individuals with immediate family members living abroad differ from those without migrant connections in their views on political participation and various indicators of democracy. The findings do not suggest causation but rather point out to correlations through which further implications and hypotheses can be drawn and tested.

For instance, when the Kosovo-based sample was asked to “identify one of the [many] problems which [they] think

represents the paramount problem that Kosovo faces currently<sup>7</sup>, they suggested the following (see Figure 13) according to whether or not they have a family member abroad. Interestingly, the record is mixed. Education takes a larger share, including unemployment, as the utmost problem facing Kosovo in the opinion of those who have a family member(s) abroad compared to those who don't. However, the same is not noted when it comes to concerns about taxation, poverty, or even the environment. Those with no family members abroad mark such issues as an utmost problem much more than those who have family members abroad. Poverty as an utmost problem features much more strongly as a concern among those with no family members living abroad (see Figure 13).

Fig. 13

## Kosovo respondents' first utmost concern at the moment based on whether they have a family member abroad (Yes) or not (No)



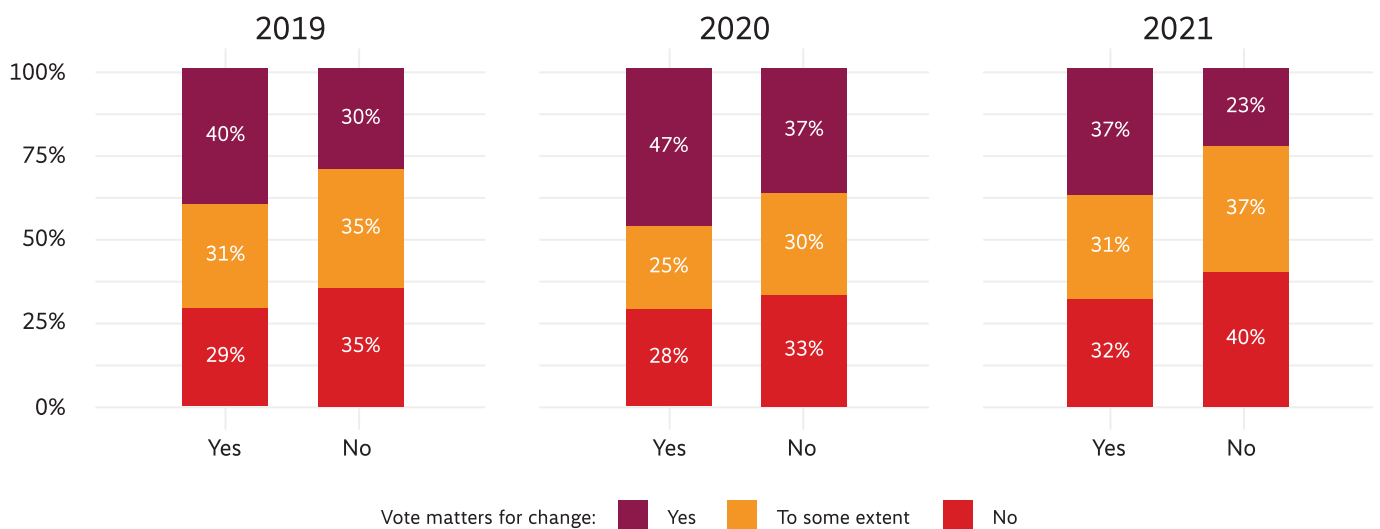
<sup>7</sup> The UNDP data for the “paramount problems” include many other issues; however, we present only the selection of relevant problems for the purposes of this study, such as those that entail broader social problems, and not many other issues that the UNDP lists.

When it comes to political participation in terms of voting, the record is more straightforward. When asked whether they believe their vote can bring change in Kosovo, respondents with family members abroad were over 10 percentage points more likely to agree compared to those without

migrant connections. Though, it is noticeable that the trend has shifted slightly over the years. Regardless of having family members abroad, the share of respondents who believe their vote can bring change has declined over the past five years.

Fig. 14

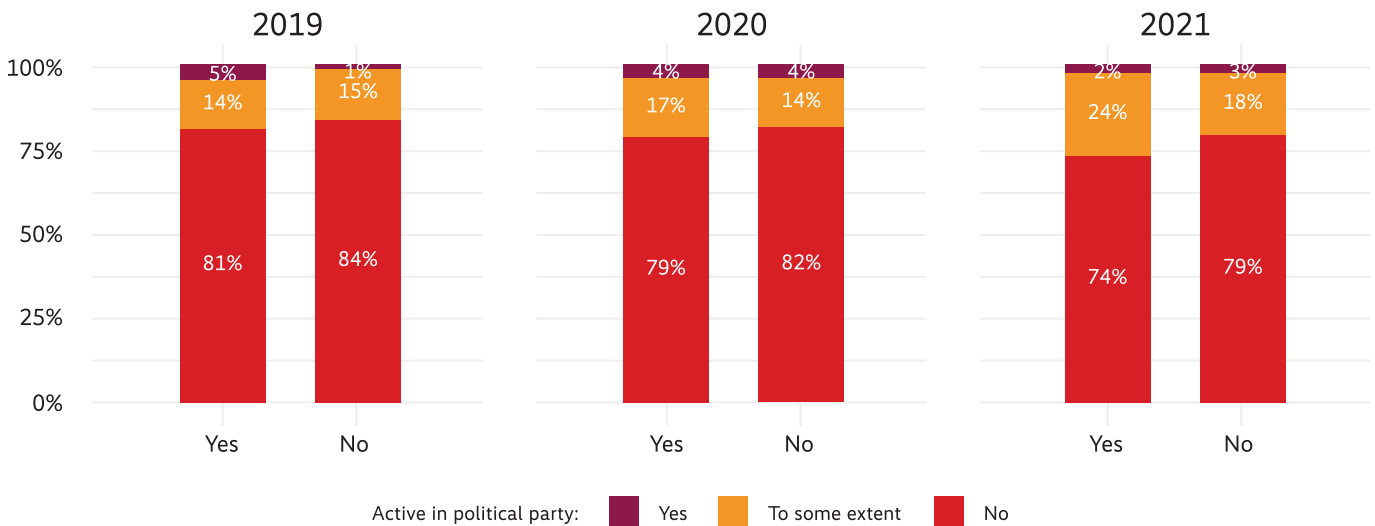
*Kosovo respondents' opinion on whether their vote matters for change based on whether they have a family member abroad (Yes) or not (No)*



When it comes to active participation such as in political parties (Figure 15), CSOs (Figure 16), and citizens' initiatives (Figure 17), there are only slight differences between those in Kosovo with or without family members abroad. When asked whether they had participated in a political party in the last six months, respondents in Kosovo provided the following responses based on whether they had family members abroad. Those with family members abroad appear to only slightly participate more in political parties than those who have no family members abroad. In Kosovo, individuals with family members abroad participate in political parties only slightly more—by about 3-5 percentage points—than those without migrant connections.

This is especially the case when it comes to the more recent years: 2020 and 2021. Existing empirical evidence cannot immediately suggest any causal link between the recent growth in Kosovo migrants' share of voting and registration to vote from abroad and increased participation at home. This might be because, as Figure 15 shows, there is a general trend in the increase in political party participation both among those who have and those who do not have family members abroad in the years between 2019 and 2021. Yet, overall, those with family members abroad continue to be slightly more engaged in political parties (both actively and inactively) than those with no family members abroad.

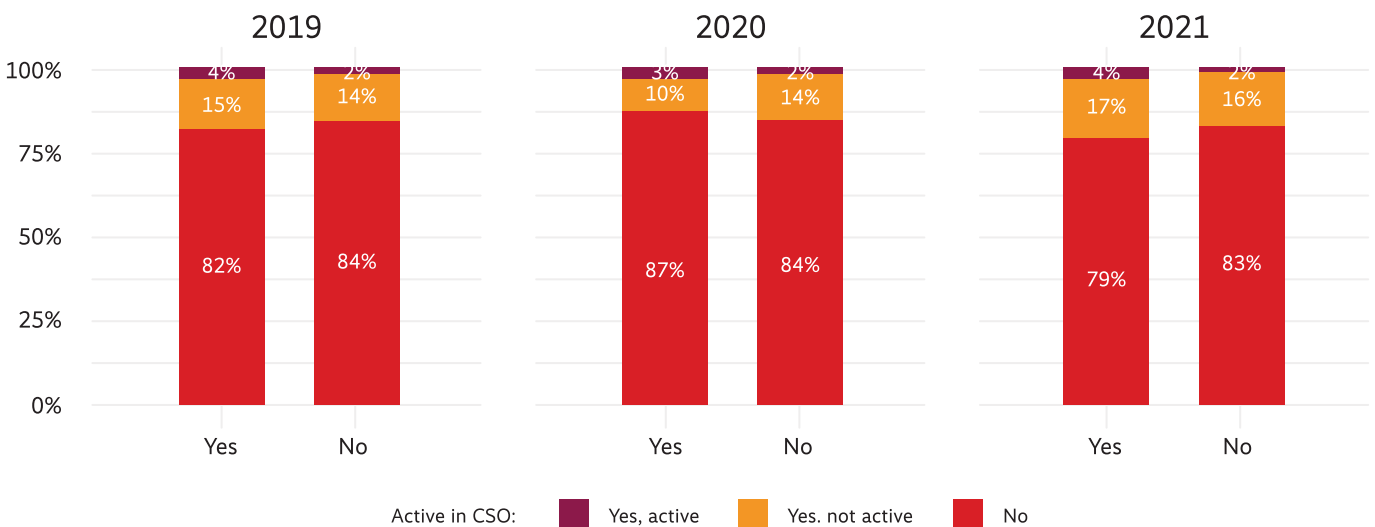
*Kosovo respondents' opinion on their participation in a political party based on whether they have a family member abroad (Yes) or not (No)*



Likewise, when asked if in “the last six months have [they] been [a] participant” in a CSO, the Kosovo respondents suggest very similar trends as when asked about political parties. Respondents are generally very inactive, with those having family members abroad showing only a slightly higher participation rate – but rather insignificant com-

pared to those who do not have family members abroad. Additionally, just like with political parties, there is a general trend in CSO participation, both among those with family members abroad and those with no family members abroad between 2019 and 2021.

*Kosovo respondents' opinion on their participation in a CSO based on whether they have a family member abroad (Yes) or not (No)*

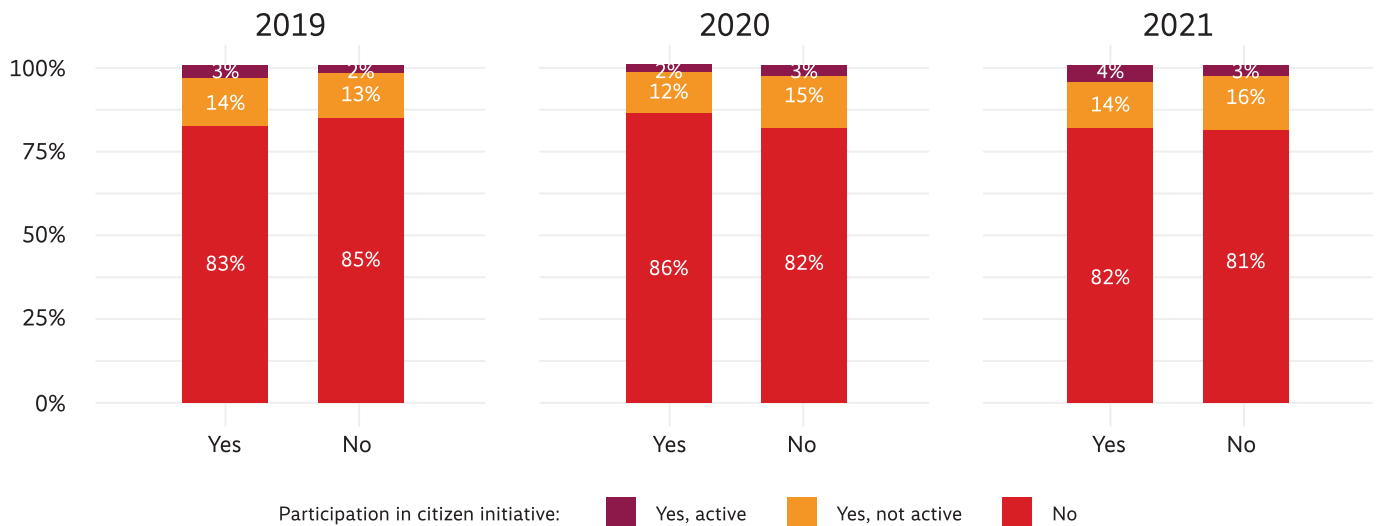


When asked if in “the last six months have [they] been [a] participant” in any citizen initiative, the Kosovo respondents suggested the following based on whether or not

they have a family member abroad (see Figure 17). There are insignificant differences among the two groups.

Fig. 17

*Kosovo respondents’ opinion on their participation in a citizen initiative based on whether they have a family member abroad (Yes) or not (No)*



These minors, yet important, differences between the respondents who have an immediate migrant family background (i.e., having a family member abroad) and those with no family member abroad when it comes to participation in political life in Kosovo do not appear random. Respondents' opinions on various questions measuring Kosovo's democratization index follow similar patterns. While the report presents the patterns for a score of democratic indicators below, by comparing respondents with and without immediate family migrant background, we discuss

some of the findings in general. For instance, when asked if "the elections in Kosovo [are] democratic and in accordance with international standards?" respondents with family members abroad believe that the elections in Kosovo are democratic much more than those with no family members abroad. The difference between the two groups of respondents is the same across the years; although, this difference grows significantly in 2021 (see Figure 18). Similar is the case with other democracy indicators that are presented below.

Fig. 18

### Are the elections in Kosovo conducted democratically and in accordance with international standards?

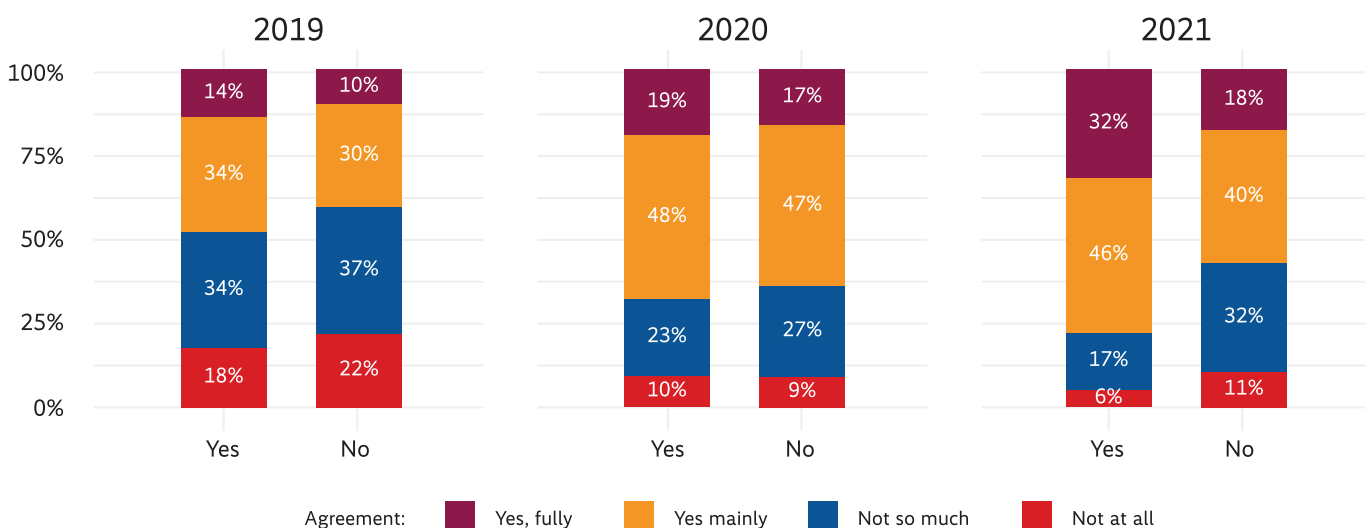


Fig. 19

### Does the parliament monitor the government's performance?

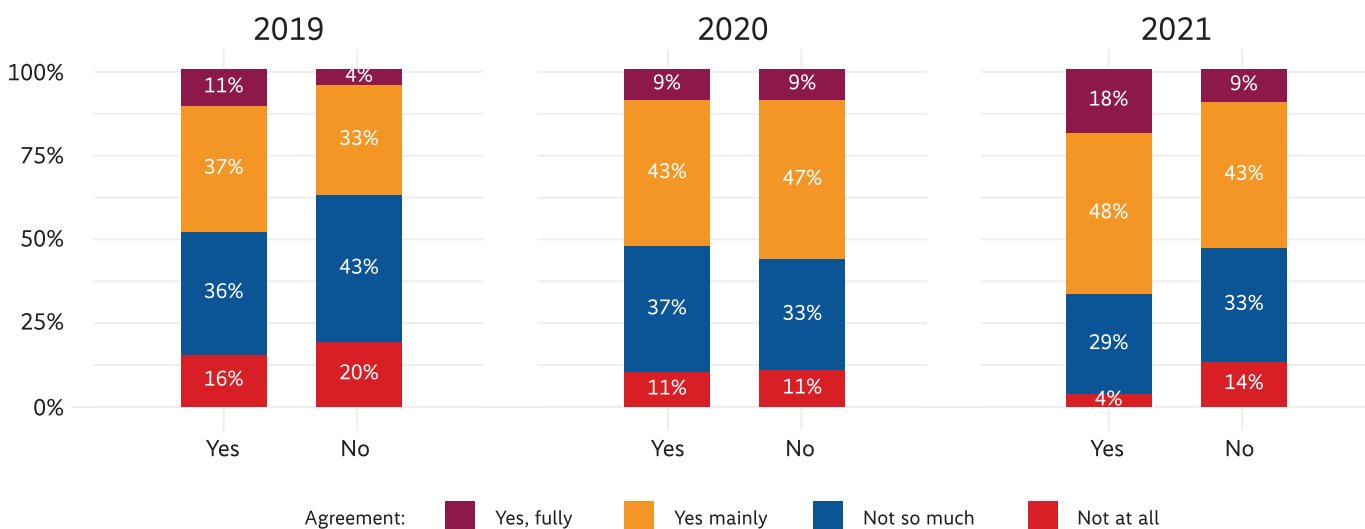


Fig. 20

### Does the judiciary branch render its decisions without bias?

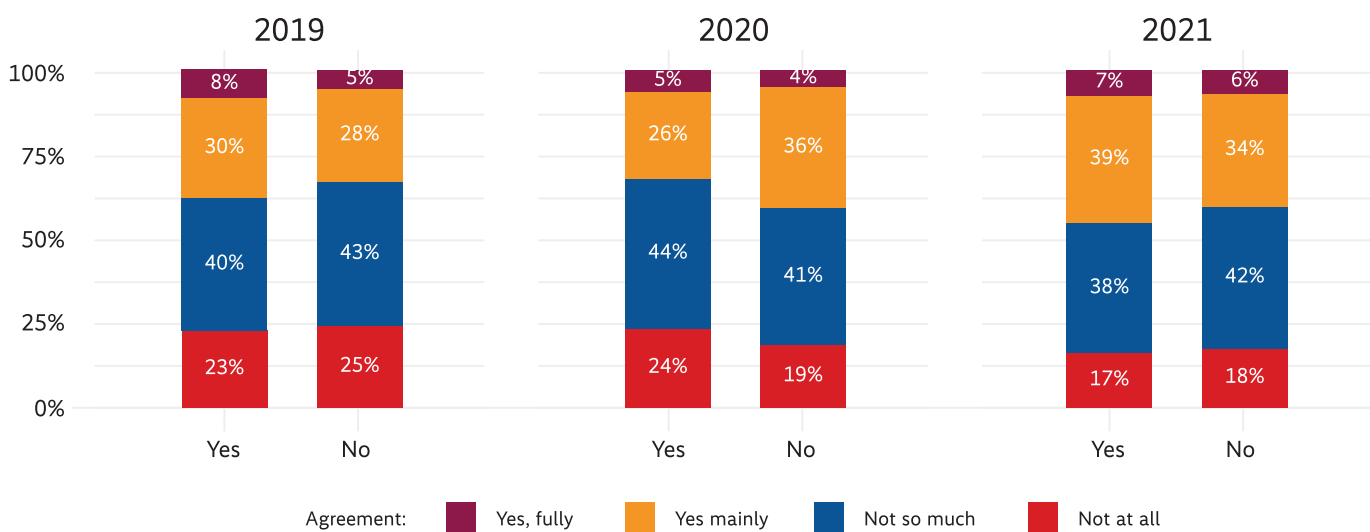
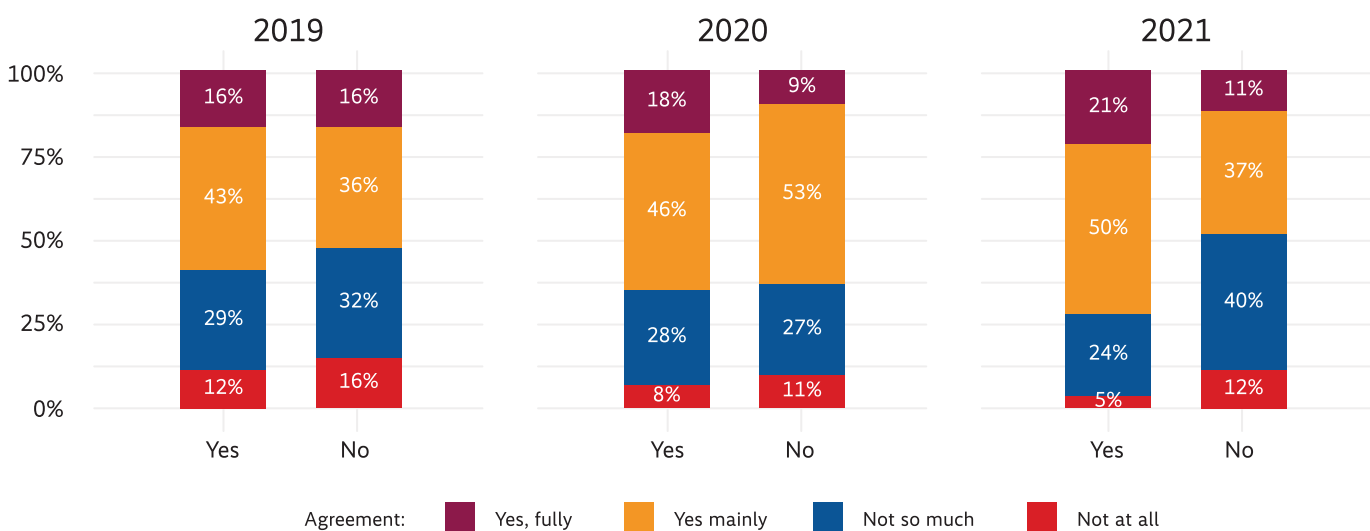


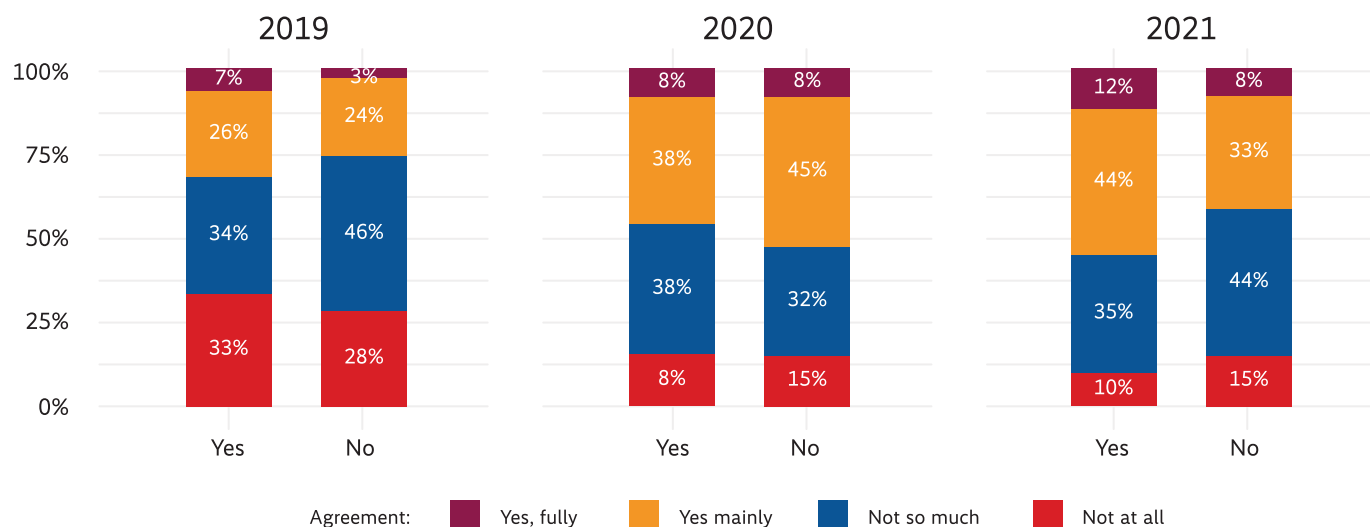
Fig. 21

### Does media in Kosovo enjoy the freedom of expression?

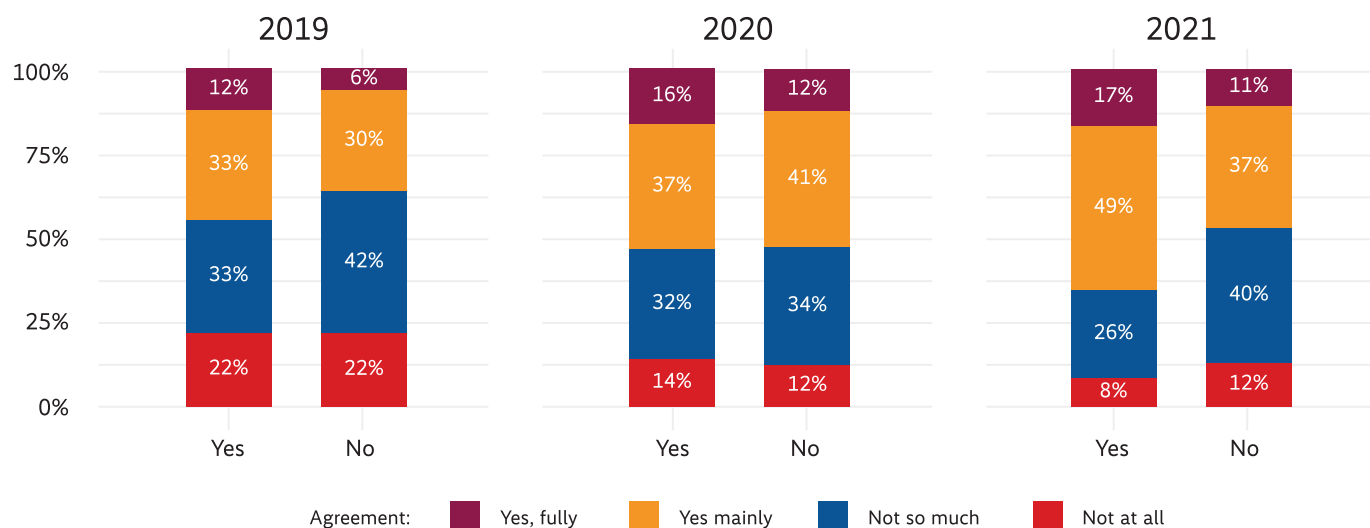




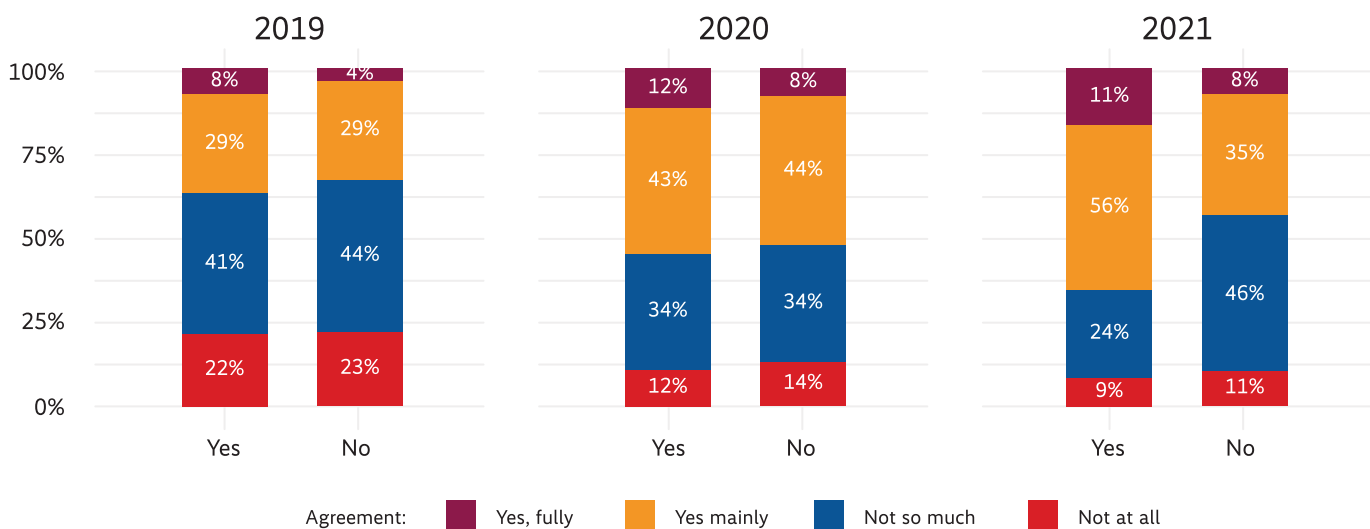
### Is Kosovo executive governing in line with the priorities of its citizens?



### Are Kosovo's Constitution and laws in line with democratic and human rights principles?



*Regardless of daily politics, do you agree that the democratic processes in Kosovo are well established and going in the right direction?*



The observed differences between respondents in Kosovo with and without family members abroad suggest several implications and potential hypotheses. First, the recent rise in Kosovo migrants leaving for employment rather than family reunification suggests a growing trend of ‘incomplete’ migration—where individuals maintain ties to both their home and host countries. While not a new concept in migration studies, the growing share of ‘incomplete’ migration—where individuals maintain closer and more active ties to both their home and host countries—raises the potential for increased cross-border political engagement. As Duquette-Rury et al. (2018, p. 18) suggest, domestic politics at home ‘need not necessarily be local,’ as cross-border links created by ‘incomplete’ migration generate mechanisms and motivations for both migrants and those in the home country to engage politically. This resonates with some of the findings presented in this report, whereby Kosovo citizens with family members abroad are more politically active than those with no family members abroad (see Figure 14 and Figure 15).

When it comes to Kosovo citizens with family members abroad scoring higher in their opinion on various democracy indicators in Kosovo, compared to those without, a few hypotheses can be offered. First, individuals or families who receive remittances from abroad associate such financial benefits with stability and progress, compared to those with no such financial flows. Stability can enhance perceptions that the home country is doing better and thus “shield” them from the potential immediate instability or hardship at home. Though Chauvet’s et al. (2016) study

does not offer a full explanation of the matter, they do show very similar patterns among the Malian migrants’ effects on their home country’s political beliefs. Malian migrants think of their home country politics more positively than Malians living in the home country.

Having close ties to migrants, be that familial or otherwise – such as close friends or other contacts, provides for the “check-in” mechanism for those living in the home country. Batista et al. (2019) show that frequent contact with migrants provides improved knowledge for broader political processes and, therefore, potentially greater motivation to participate politically. The economic and political impacts of such contacts between recent migrants and those in the home country can be illustrated through anecdotal evidence, which serves to highlight the issue. For instance, both politicians and migrants in and from Kosovo, have recently adopted the narrative that “it is not that bad in Kosovo, after all” when it comes to discussing whether it is justified to emigrate from Kosovo. One of the Kosovo Members of the Parliament in 2019 commented that he has two brothers in Germany who cannot afford to take a shower more than twice a month, suggesting that in comparison Kosovo is not as bad as assumed (Berisha 2019). In a recent interview, Kosovo’s Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, also provided a few elaborations on why emigrating might not be the solution that potential emigrants might be seeking to achieve – life abroad may not be much easier than in Kosovo (Publikja 2024). There are but a few instances of anecdotal evidence pointing to the same direction of the discussion about emigration from Kosovo.

# Conclusions

The discussion of this report highlights several patterns with regards to the role of migration in shaping Kosovo's socio-political landscape. The analysis reveals several key trends and their implications:

- Kosovo has experienced significant emigration, with over half a million citizens leaving between 2012 and 2021. Yet, one should account for those who have also emigrated away from their initial place of residence in their migratory endeavor. The number of those who left Kosovo for good in the past decade fares much closer to around and over 300,000 in the past decade.
- The drivers of migration have evolved, with employment overtaking family reunification as the primary reason for emigration. This reflects shifting socio-economic conditions and highlights the role of economic factors in migration decisions. Such a shift in reasons for migration among Kosovo citizens creates several implications. Labor migrants maintain closer ties to their home country than those migrating for family reunification. Dubbed “incomplete” migrants, labor migrants maintain both professional and familial ties with their home country are more likely to engage in home country politics.
- Relatedly, the demographic profile of migrants is changing, with a rising share of older individuals migrating while the proportion of youth declines. The shifting age group among Kosovo migrants reflects the shifts in the reasons for migration too, as discussed above. Worth adding here is that such types of migrants are also those who tend to return more frequently, but who also may have more concrete plans for returning permanently. Thus, the stakes for such migrants are much higher in the home country than those who migrate for family (re-unification) reasons with a lesser tendency to plan to return.
- There has been a dramatic rise in diaspora participation in Kosovo's elections, with registered voters from abroad growing from 1,600 in 2010 to over 102,000 in 2021. This increase has outpaced changes in migratory trends, suggesting that other factors – such as intensified political campaigning targeting the diaspora or increased political awareness – are at play. However, both the shifting age group and reasons for migration may reflect, at least in part, the increased interest in political participation at home.
- Individuals in Kosovo with migrant members of the family abroad tend to exhibit higher political participation at home, also believing more strongly that their votes can effect change in Kosovo. Additionally, these families prioritize issues like education and unemployment more than households without migrant members, reflecting potential value transfers from host countries. However, there is little evidence of significant diaspora-driven shifts in other socio-political issues, such as environmental concerns or gender-based violence, emphasizing the selective nature of migration's influence.
- Similarly, when it comes to several indicators of the democratization index in Kosovo, individuals with migrant family members abroad share more optimism regarding the democratic functioning of the home state compared to those individuals with no migrant family members abroad. This is the case for a score of democracy indicators such as the electoral process, the functioning of the executive, parliament, judiciary, freedom of media, and others. The report drew a few hypotheses as to why this may be the case. First, the more frequent back-and-forth migrants, especially among those who increasingly migrated for employment reasons, undergo a reality check between their democratic host states and their home country. Second, remittances provide more stability for families in the home country which, in part, can “insulate” them from immediate domestic challenges, fostering a more optimistic outlook. The effects of post-visa liberalization on temporary migration and its potential to impact political behavior remain unstudied.
- Finally, Kosovo needs to debate the value of its migratory population for its internal socio-political beliefs and functioning. The following recommendations and takeaways can be offered for future debate and implementation:
  - Kosovo's diaspora is often treated as a homogeneous group, overlooking its internal diversity. As the findings from the present report show, migrants are far from a homogenous group, including when it comes to its members' political stakes and responsibilities in and for the home country.
  - The variety within the diaspora calls for a multifaceted approach to their engagement in the home country's politics and democratization process. A more systematic data collection process on the variety of migrants can aid Kosovo in directing its resources and expectations about what migrants are more likely to be interested in, but also have social and political interest to be involved in home country politics. As the report suggests, labor migrants are more likely to have social, economic, and political stakes in their home country politics; thus, working more closely with such types of

migrants can foster greater integration between the migrant and the home country.

→ When it comes to the direct impact on the political outcomes in the home country, such as through the electoral process in which all citizenship-holding migrants also hold the equal right to vote in the home country, the variety among (i) home country citizenship-only migrants and dual citizenship migrants, on the one

hand, and (ii) first-second-third- generation migrants need to be recognized. Though this raises another major normative discussion, not all such migrants hold the same stakes in the home country's politics compared to the non-migrant population at home. The debate on recognizing such varieties and their political outcomes at home should also include non-Albanian population migrants on equal terms.









## About the author

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