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The Albanian Scientific Diaspora from Kosovo: Prospects for Cooperation and Return

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of empirical research into the characteristics of the Kosovan scientific diaspora. We define ‘scientific diaspora’ as persons holding a PhD or studying for one who are currently living and working abroad. This export of highly qualified talent is a major issue across the Western Balkan countries, and seems to be particularly high amongst ethnic Albanians, not only in Kosovo but also in Albania and the Albanian-speaking populations of North Macedonia and Montenegro. In the early sections of the paper, we review the history of emigration from Kosovo and trace the evolution of the debate on brain drain to argue for a shift towards considering it more in terms of a scientific diaspora which can be mobilised for supporting the home country, in this case Kosovo. The empirical heart of the paper is the presentation of findings from a dual-survey methodology: an online survey of Kosovan PhD-holders and PhD students abroad (397 respondents), and a follow-up programme of interviews with 39 of the survey respondents. We find the Kosovan scientific diaspora mainly concentrated in the USA and in German-speaking European countries (Germany, Switzerland, Austria) and spread across a wide range of subjects and research specialisms. They are a young, dynamic population: three quarters of the survey sample are aged below 40. Their reasons for emigrating – poor quality of academic life in Kosovo, political and economic instability in the wider society – are the same reasons which hinder their future return. Only one-third of the survey respondents replied that they intended to return to Kosovo, although many more were undecided. By contrast a much larger share said they wanted ‘to give something back’ to their homeland by making a range of other contributions – short-term teaching assignments, research collaboration, writing joint publications etc. The Kosovan embassies could do more to encourage productive contacts with the homeland. Another suggestion is to create a comprehensive databank of Kosovan emigrants’ scientific expertise, which could be called upon to assist development objectives, both in the wider economy and society of Kosovo and in the university and scientific research sector.

Keywords

Kosovo, scientific diaspora, brain drain, social capital, return migration, diaspora cooperation

Introduction

In 2018 the authors carried out an online survey with the Albanian scientific diaspora from Albania (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021). We defined the scientific diaspora in a very simple way as Albanian nationals with a PhD who were working abroad, or who were studying for a PhD abroad. During that survey we found that some of the respondents were ethnic Albanians from Kosovo (where they are the great majority of the population) and from North Macedonia, Montenegro and the Presheva Valley in Serbia (where they are minorities). We thought it would be a good idea to extend the scientific diaspora survey more formally to these other ethnic-Albanian territories, starting in this paper with Kosovo. We had come to realise that, for most

respondents, the identity label ‘Albanian’ held more importance than the citizenship of a particular nation-state. We also thought that it would be interesting to compare the results of the two surveys – Albania and Kosovo.

The notion of a ‘scientific diaspora’ is not widespread in diaspora scholarship, and it does not appear in any of the canonical texts on diaspora (e.g. Clifford 1993; Cohen 1997; Safran 1991).¹ However, since around 2000 an increasingly substantial literature on scientific diasporas has emerged, largely in the context of their potential contribution to the development of the diasporic country of origin (see, *inter alia*, Barré et al. 2003; Bonilla et al. 2022; Meyer and Brown 1999; Tejada 2012; Tejada et al. 2013). Rather than emerging from the standard or general literature on diasporas, the label ‘scientific diaspora’ has been promoted as an antidote to the more negative interpretations of ‘brain drain’. This can be seen in the changing perspective articulated by Bhagwati, one of the most avid original critics of brain drain from developing countries. In the 1970s Bhagwati called for a taxation to be imposed on the rich countries which benefited from ‘brain gain’ in order to offset the loss of high-level human capital suffered by poor countries through brain drain (Bhagwati 1979; Bhagwati and Martin 1976). Twenty years later the same author wrote that developing countries could benefit from the talents and skills of their citizens studying, working and being trained abroad (Bhagwati and Rao 1994). However, this mobilisation of the scientific diaspora for the benefit of the home country through return migration or development cooperation (for non-returnees) is by no means an automatic process, as our earlier study on Albania verified (Gëdeshi and King 2021). Policies to favour return and cooperation need to be implemented by both countries involved in the transfer of knowledge, skills and expertise – the host country and the country of origin.

In view of the high level of human capital involved – people trained in universities and research centres, often in specialised subjects such as business studies, medicine, engineering and IT which are in demand globally – the scientific diaspora has a higher development potential than other segments of a country’s emigrant population. Theoretically, this impact becomes apparent via return migration: the transfer of know-how, technology, skills and values, investment of foreign-earned capital, a change in mentality, and the overall modernisation of the country. If return does not take place, the question arises as to what extent these transfers can be imparted via other means, for instance through short-term visits or virtual collaboration. Thus, the main question guiding this research is: what role can the scientific diaspora play in the development of Kosovo? For this potential to be realised, certain socio-economic and political prerequisites are needed, as discussed later in the paper.

Based on a mix of quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (interviews) techniques, the study aims to answer a series of mainly descriptive and policy-related questions about the characteristics of the Kosovan scientific diaspora and its potential for helping the development of the home country. To be more specific, six questions guide our analysis:

¹ We stress that these three citations are a minimal selection from the large ‘classic’ literature on diasporas and which tends to regard diasporas as populations in exile due to some traumatic historical event. In more recent years, since about 2000, the meaning of diaspora has become widened to include many transnational migrant populations, including those of recent formation. Some have argued against this conceptual stretching, suggesting that the meaning of diaspora has itself become ‘diasporised’, i.e. scattered (Brubaker 2005).

1. What is the size of the Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo?
2. Where is it most concentrated and is its geography changing?
3. What are its educational and employment characteristics?
4. What human and social capital does the scientific diaspora possess, i.e. what are the forms and density of such connections both abroad and with colleagues and institutions in the home country?
5. What is the likelihood of return for the scientific diaspora to Kosovo? What preconditions should be in place to facilitate and encourage return?
6. What are the actual and potential forms of cooperation between the scientific diaspora and academic, scientific and business institutions in Kosovo?

Before answering these questions on the basis of our survey and interview data, two other sections follow here immediately: some essential background on the evolution of Albanian migration from Kosovo, and the methods used to collect our research data.

Migration from Kosovo

According to the World Bank's *Migration and Remittances Factbook*, Kosovo is one of the top countries in the world for the scale and intensity of emigration relative to its population. Its 550,000 emigrants living abroad are equivalent to 30 per cent of the country's population (World Bank 2016). Another key statistic comes from the 2011 Census, which gave the size of Kosovan diaspora as 704,000 persons – 550,000 emigrants plus 154,000 born abroad to Kosovan parents (Agjensia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2014). The same source gives the distribution of the diaspora as mainly concentrated in Germany (35 per cent) and Switzerland (23 per cent) with smaller shares, between 2 and 7 per cent, in (in descending order) Italy, Austria, Sweden, USA, France, UK, Belgium and Slovenia. More recently, Gashi (2021) estimates the Kosovan diaspora at around 1 million, equal to half the total Kosovan population.

The Albanian diaspora from Kosovo consists of three historical layers: the 'old diaspora' resulting from labour migration in the early years of the post-World War Two period; those who fled the ethnic cleansing and severe conflict of the 1990s; and the most recent migration wave since 2000. For sure, emigration has been a dynamic and intense process, part of Kosovo's history and tradition (Blaku 1996). Set alongside the larger and well-documented case of Albanian migration, that from Kosovo has a very different temporal rhythm and geographical distribution, and has been little documented and analysed in comparison (King and Vullnetari 2009). As a region of the former Yugoslavia and later part of Serbia and Montenegro, almost no data on migration were collected separately for Kosovo during this period, let alone for Albanians as a separate ethnic group (Vathi and Black 2007).

Based on the existing literature, we may divide emigration from Kosovo since the 1960s into four stages.²

² See Mustafa et al. (2007). However, some authors (notably Gashi and Haxhikadrija 2012) point to an earlier period, 1945–early 1960s, when tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians were forcibly displaced from Kosovo to Turkey under the repressive policies of Rankovic. Other authors concur and give some estimates of the scale of the displacement. According to Vickers (1998) around 195,000 Albanians were removed to Turkey in the period

The first starts in the early 1960s and is the ‘guestworker’ stage when young men, poorly educated, low-skilled, and mainly from rural or marginalised urban areas, migrated to Western Europe for factory and construction work. Germany and Switzerland were the main destination countries, but some migrants also went to Austria, France and Belgium. If labour demand for un- and semi-skilled workers was the main pull factor for this migration, the key push factors were high unemployment, low and uncertain incomes, and limited industrial development in Kosovo. After a while, family reunification became possible and so the phenomenon of temporary labour migration matured into a more stable settlement and integration of families marked by economic progress and improved social status. Children went to school in the various host countries and became the adult second generation and eventually – a process now ongoing – the parents of the third generation.

Other changes also took place during this first phase. The oil crisis of 1973-1974 dampened the inflow of migrants to the industrialised countries and led to some return migration in the later 1970s and throughout the 1980s. At the same time, more jobs became available in the public sector and in small businesses in Kosovo as its political status within the former Yugoslavia improved. However, in the 1980s following student demonstrations in Kosovo and violent reprisals, many students and others who joined them became subject to persecution and left the country – a first sign of brain drain (Haxhikadrija 2009).

The second stage, covering approximately the years 1989-1997, is characterised by the loss of Kosovo’s autonomous region status under the repressive Milosevic regime. Unemployment soared as Albanians were ejected from their jobs – 150,000 according to Gashi (2021). Poverty became widespread and many young people, from all parts of the country and both more- and less-educated, had to emigrate to more advanced countries in the EU, for a mix of political and economic reasons. Migration was viewed as the only way to escape poverty and to improve the living conditions of family members back home by sending remittances. Also amongst the migrants were many young men who wanted to escape conscription into the army of the former Yugoslavia (Dahinden 2005; Haxhikadrija 2009).

The third stage covers the years 1998-1999 and the war in Kosovo, as a result of which more than 800,000 ethnic Albanians fled the country as refugees, mainly to Albania and to a lesser extent to the Albanian regions of North Macedonia and Montenegro. Some eventually made it as refugees to EU countries and the USA. At the end of the war, many returned voluntarily to Kosovo (Gashi 2021).

The fourth stage starts around 2000 and continues up to the present. The migration drivers are mainly economic – high unemployment (26 per cent in 2020), especially youth unemployment (49 per cent for 15-24 year-olds), and low incomes (European Training Foundation 2021). As a result, a high incidence of poverty also becomes part of the mix of push factors: in 2017 18 per cent of the population were estimated to be living below the national poverty line, including 5 per cent below the extreme poverty line (World Bank 2019). Other mechanisms driving emigration in this most recent period are continuing family reunification and students going abroad for their education. Overall, we note a kind of bifurcation of migratory types in recent years: on the one hand well-educated young adults going abroad for

1953-1960; and Blumi (2003) uncovers many ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and North Macedonia mis-identified as ‘Yugoslavs’ or ‘Turks’ in the early postwar emigrations to Europe and elsewhere.

education and career purposes; on the other hand the irregular migration of unskilled and less-educated individuals. The latter form peaked in 2015 when around 37,000 Kosovan citizens applied for asylum in EU countries, mainly in Germany. The number of asylum-seekers subsequently fell away due to expedited and stricter procedures and very low acceptance rates (Gëdeshi and King 2022; Vathi et al. 2023).

According to the Kosovan Census of 2011, the migratory population has the following demographic structure: a majority of men over women (56.7 vs 43.3 per cent), and a young age structure, with 47.2 per cent aged 25-44 years and only 1.3 per cent aged 65 years or older (Agjensia e Statistikave të Kosovës 2014). In terms of education, available data show that most emigrants have completed secondary education but only 5 per cent have tertiary education (Gashi and Haxhikadria 2012). But those figures are now more than decade out of date.

Given the above, the question arises as to the extent to which the large emigration flows from Kosovo contain an element of *brain drain*. To partially answer this, we step aside from Kosovo for a moment and look at the better-documented case of Albania. In the *Migration and Remittances Factbook*, the World Bank (2016) ranks Albania among the top 15 countries of the world for the share of emigrated persons who are university graduates, with the share of migrating graduates increasing decade-on-decade (d'Aiglepierre et al. 2020). According to the Albanian Labour Force Survey data for 2012-2019, almost 40 per cent of the migratory outflows consisted of persons with a university education and another 30 per cent had vocational education (Leitner 2021). Our own survey on potential migration in Albania found that the desire to emigrate is highest amongst tertiary-educated young people with good qualifications (King and Gëdeshi 2020).

Therefore, it would seem that Kosovo lags behind Albania in both the share of the population with tertiary education and the share of the tertiary-educated in emigrant flows. Hoti (2009) estimated that only 7.4 per cent of Kosovans having tertiary education had emigrated (but 13 per cent of engineers and doctors). And Leitner (2021) notes, based on Labour Force Survey data for 2016-2018, that most of the emigration from Kosovo consisted of young people who have secondary rather than tertiary education. This of course is not unrelated to the lower level of tertiary education amongst the Kosovan population as a whole. On the other hand, European Training Foundation data for 202 show that the level of unemployment is higher amongst persons with higher education; thus this group has a lower incentive to migrate.³

If the above brief comparative analysis suggests that, unlike Albania, the Kosovan emigration has yet to take on the character of a brain drain, there are nonetheless some indications that this situation may change in the near future. First, the Kosovan population is young by European standards: in 2020 its mean age was 26, and there is still a relatively high birth rate of 2.4 children per woman (Gashi 2021). Second, the education level of the population has been improving rapidly, especially post-independence (2008). As Table 1 shows, the share of the 30-34 years-old cohort with higher education more than doubled from 9.3 per cent in 2012 to 20.9 per cent in 2018. Note also the closing of the gender gap over the same period. In

³ According to the ETF, the 2020 unemployment rate was 34.2 per cent for persons with only primary education, 26.6 per cent for those with secondary education, and 19.2 per cent for those with tertiary education (still, of course, a high figure). See European Training Foundation (2021).

2012 men were almost twice as likely to be graduates as women; by 2018 gender parity had been attained on this metric.

Table 1
Share of age-group 30-34 with tertiary education (%)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	9.3	12.0	14.8	17.2	19.1	21.8	20.9
Men	12.1	14.2	16.6	19.5	18.9	22.4	20.9
Women	6.5	9.9	13.0	14.7	19.4	21.2	20.8

Source: European Training Foundation (2021)

Some destination-country data and policies reinforce this trend towards an incipient brain drain, especially insights from Germany, the largest host of the Kosovan diaspora and the continuing target for most recent and current migrants, as well as a country pursuing the recruitment of high-skilled migrants from the Western Balkans. In 2019, according to the German Federal Employment Agency, 7204 Kosovans were working in the German health sector, 809 more than in the previous year. Other reports show that nearly all medical students in Kosovo are learning German in order to facilitate their chances of migration (Ahmetxhekaj 2019). And Eurostat data show that Kosovan applications for student visas surged from 367 in 2013 to 994 in 2018 (Hajdari and Krasniqi 2021).

Hence we ask not only about how large is the actual and likely brain drain in Kosovo and what are its characteristics, but also what should be done in order for these new trends – the growing emigration of well-educated young people – to result in positive consequences for the development of Kosovo?

Methodological considerations

This study on the Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo is based on three methodological approaches: a review of the available literature and statistics, presented in the previous section; an online survey of PhD-holders and PhD students currently working and/or studying abroad; and follow-up interviews with a subsample recruited from the survey respondents.

The online survey started in 2021 and continued into 2023, by which time the survey questionnaire had been completed by 397 respondents, of whom 65 per cent were holders of PhDs and 35 per cent were enrolled on PhD programmes abroad.

The length of time taken to administer the survey – more than two years – reflects the challenges inherent in contacting an essentially ‘unknown’ survey population where a simple database of potential respondents is lacking. Accordingly, our strategy of contacting research participants involved a variety of tactics and phases. A first approach was made to Kosovan PhD researchers and graduates abroad whom we knew either from personal academic networks or from previous research projects; hence, we already had their email addresses. Other electronic contacts were obtained by searching social-academic networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Some representatives of Kosovo’s embassies in European countries also helped with contacts, for example in Germany and Sweden.

After establishing an initial contact, diaspora members were then sent the survey and a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study and the promise of confidentiality regarding personal data. When a positive response was received, with the survey filled out, a thank you email was sent in which respondents were asked to help us extend the survey, either by supplying us with the contact details of other potential recipients or by forwarding them the survey themselves. Hence the number of responses was increased via this so-called snowball method. In addition to answering the survey questions, several respondents sent back notes of appreciation, as well as their own comments and opinions on the Kosovan scientific diaspora and its potential for collaboration with partner scientific institutions in Kosovo and Albania. Some of these written observations are included in this study, whilst preserving their anonymity.

The overall response rate was 55 per cent, which we deem satisfactory for an online survey of this kind. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether the requests sent out reached a representative cross-section of the Kosovan scientific diaspora; nor that the actual responses received are not a biased selection from the questionnaires distributed. We also acknowledge the potential of repetition of similar cases inherent in the snowball method. Nevertheless, given the robust total of respondents (397), and the broader information received in the interviews, we have no reason to believe that the general picture which we present of the survey results is significantly distorted.

The survey takes around 15 minutes to fill out. It consists of eight blocks of questions, as follows:

1. Socio-demographic data (age, gender, civil status, place of birth, current residence).
2. Pre-migration experience (education, employment).
3. Migration history (year of emigration, reasons for leaving, selection of destination country).
4. Studies abroad (level, field of study, period of study, university/ies attended).
5. Employment abroad (including matching with qualifications held).
6. Social capital acquired (contacts with colleagues and others both in the host country and in Kosovo, participation in networks and associations)
7. Return to Kosovo (desire to return, timing of return, type of work sought, reasons and conditions for return, obstacles to return).
8. Cooperation with universities and other scientific bodies in Kosovo (public or private sector, desired form of collaboration etc.)

The findings are presented later below, more or less in the same order as listed above and corresponding to the research questions set out in the Introduction.

The third research method utilised was follow-up and key interviews. A subsample of 39 survey respondents was interviewed, mostly via Skype; they were distributed across several typical destination countries, including Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Belgium and the United States. These interviews enabled more qualitative information to be collected, especially pertaining to the history and reasons for migration, choices of destination country, institution and course of study, work experiences before and after migration, social capital, daily life, identity, plans to return and ideas about cooperation. A smaller number of more informal interviews were also carried out with key informants such as ambassadors,

representatives of international organisations and NGOs, and experts on education and on migration in Kosovo. Where possible, interviews were recorded, with the interviewee's permission, and then selectively transcribed according to the relevance of the conversation to the research themes of the study. All the names in the quotations that follow are fictitious and standard procedures on confidentiality have been applied. In all cases, the interviews were conducted in the Albanian language. Translation of quotes are by the authors.

Size and structure of the Kosovan scientific diaspora

Whilst there are estimates of the size of the overall Kosovan diaspora which we reviewed earlier, the share of this which is made up of highly educated 'brain-drain' migrants is likely to be quite small, albeit growing. For instance, in 2011 the World Bank estimated that 5.2 per cent of the 'stock' of Kosovan migrants in OECD countries had tertiary education (World Bank 2016). This share has undoubtedly grown since then, reflecting the improvement in education standards of Kosovan youth. In 2015, a survey by UNDP reported in Gashi (2021) estimated that 10 per cent of individuals who had emigrated from Kosovo in the previous six months had tertiary education, although there is no indication of the subshare with PhDs.

The online survey of PhD-holders and those studying for a PhD abroad gives us an indication of the size of this admittedly narrowly defined part of the 'stock' of 'brainy' emigrants. On the basis of 397 respondents and of this being a minority of the total 'out there', we suggest that at least 1000 Kosovans with the requisite educational status are living, working or studying in other countries – nearly all, one assumes, in advanced OECD countries.

There are three main wellsprings feeding the Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo. Firstly, there is the emigration of professionals (doctors, engineers, scientists, academics etc.) already trained to PhD level and having their PhD from abroad. Second are the young men and women who go to study for their PhDs abroad. Third, there are the highly educated children of Kosovan immigrants who came to the host country some time ago.

Our survey data shed informative light on the variations 'routes' to membership of the Kosovan scientific diaspora. The largest share, corresponding to the first source mentioned above, are the 61 per cent who, having completed their undergraduate and postgraduate studies, emigrate either as newly-qualified or more experienced professionals. Of the 61 per cent, the majority go abroad after some work experience in Kosovo (71 per cent), the remainder migrated soon after finishing their PhDs.

The second route is via study-abroad. Around 16 per cent of the survey respondents, upon completion of their high-school studies in Kosovo, continued their education to doctoral level abroad, leaving either after high school or after bachelor and/or master's courses. Many of this group received scholarships from the host country/university or from the government of Kosovo. Their connections to their home country are multiple: family, school and student friends and others in their home communities.

The third group consists of second-generation and 1.5-generation Kosovan-origin holders of PhDs and PhD students. A relatively small share of the overall sample – 10 per cent – are 'true' second-generation born and educated outside of Kosovo, i.e. in the countries that their parents migrated to for work purposes or as refugees. Despite spending all or most of their lives outside of Kosovo, 79 per cent of them still visit their parents' homeland, usually each

summer, and keep in touch with their relatives there. In the words of Doruntina, who has her PhD from Switzerland, where she still lives:

There is a large community of Albanians from Kosovo in Switzerland. In terms of numbers, they are the fifth largest community of foreigners. Many of them arrived in the 1960s and work mainly in construction and various technical professions. But their children are still attending or have graduated from university, and some of them have obtained a Master's or PhD degree.

The remainder of the third group – 13 per cent – is made up of individuals who were taken abroad as children when their parents emigrated. Depending on the age at which these children went abroad, they will have spent time varying amounts of time in school in Kosovo and then in the new host country. The survey responses show that, of this 1.5-generation subgroup, 17 per cent did not attend school in Kosovo, 29 per cent went to school in Kosovo for just a few years, and 54 per cent completed the first nine-year education cycle (i.e. before high school). Irrespective of the place of education, this subgroup, like all the others, maintains ties with family and friends in the 'homeland', including visits and virtual communications. This is important in view of possible future collaboration with academic circles and scientific institutions in Kosovo.

Demographic characteristics of Kosovan scientific diaspora

The online survey results point to a young, dynamic, highly qualified segment of the population. Nearly three-quarters are aged less than 40 (73 per cent), with a mean age for the total sample of 36 years. Men are in a slight majority (57.8 per cent of survey respondents) but we cannot be sure whether this represents the 'reality' of the scientific diaspora as we define it (on the PhD criterion); or does it reflect the greater willingness of men to be contacted and to return the survey? Of the survey respondents, 52.8 per cent are married, 43.6 per cent are single and the remainder are either cohabiting/engaged (2.3 per cent) or divorced (1.3 per cent). Some respondents are married to non-Kosovan/Albanian spouses.

An important characteristic of the diaspora under scrutiny is that it has been increasing in numbers rapidly in recent years – a feature that is consonant with its relatively young age profile. Nine out of ten survey respondents started their PhD in the period since 2007. Virtually all the PhD holders studied for their doctorates outside Kosovo; and, by the very definition of the sample population, all those who are currently studying for their PhD are doing so abroad. A majority of Kosovan PhD holders and students did their Bachelor and Master's studies abroad (56.3 and 76.4 per cent respectively), primarily in the US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Turkey and Sweden. Most of the respondents did (or are doing) their PhDs in the country where they completed their previous university studies. With others, however, we observe a kind of transition from countries where first degrees are easiest to gain to and where tuition fees and living costs are lower (e.g. Turkey, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia) to countries where the universities are more research-intensive, with prestigious PhD programmes and the possibilities of getting scholarships (US, Germany,

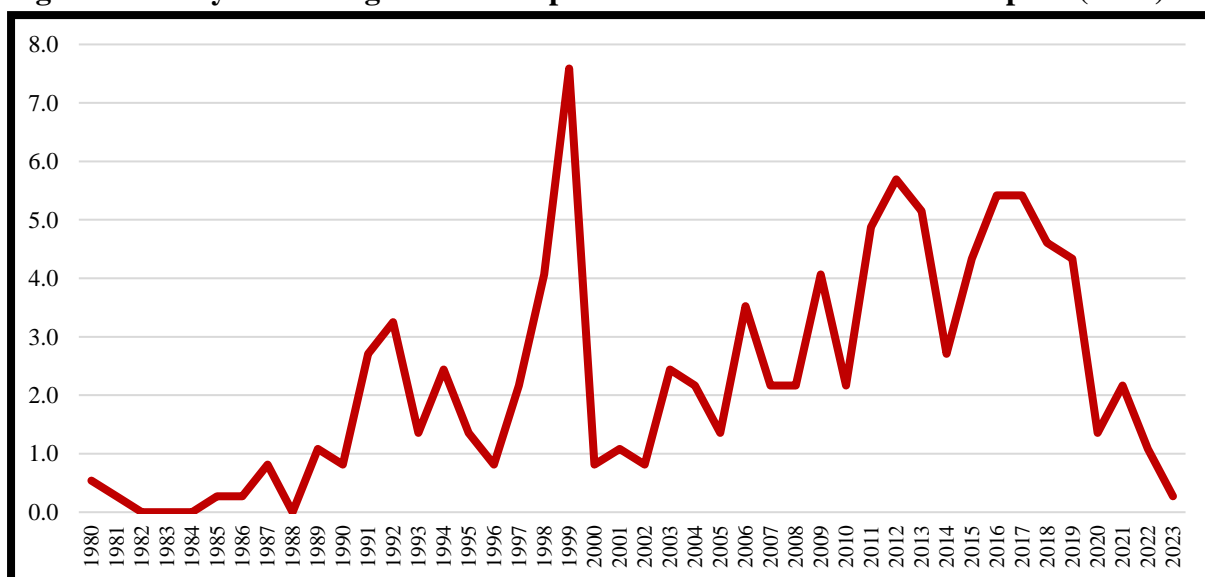
Sweden, UK etc.). Others, as we shall see, move around the advanced countries of Western Europe and North America for further study and employment.

Reasons for emigrating

The most frequently cited reason for emigrating, cited by almost three-quarters of the survey respondents (74.2 per cent), is for *study and research in a good university*. Others, especially those currently working in academic and scientific institutions abroad, nominated *lack of infrastructure and facilities for research* in their home country (17.8 per cent) and desire to acquire *specialised professional training* abroad (14.2 per cent).⁴ These three reasons, taken together, constitute a primary academic rationale for leaving Kosovo to progress their studies and specialised scientific careers. Another set of reasons, less frequently cited but nevertheless of some importance, comprise *political* (18.7 per cent) and *economic* reasons (18.4 per cent). These were more likely to be mentioned by respondents who were either born abroad to émigré parents moving abroad for political (as refugees) or economic (to escape poverty) reasons, or who taken abroad by parents as part of family migration.

The reasons given above all relate in one way or another to the phased history of emigration from Kosovo as recounted earlier. Thus, those who were born abroad or taken there as children tend to refer to the main reasons why their parents emigrated – political (Serbian repression in Kosovo) and economic factors (poverty, unemployment etc.). Those who migrated during the 1990s stress more the political factors dominant at the time – again, Serbian repression, alongside the wider conflicts in former Yugoslavia, and the war in Kosovo at the end of the 1990s. Finally, those who emigrated in the 2000s and 2010s state as their main reason for leaving the desire to study in a foreign university, seen as superior and more career-enhancing than the academic environment in Kosovo.

Figure 1. First year of emigration for representatives of the scientific diaspora (in %)



Source: CESS, survey with Albanian PhDs from Kosovo, 2023

⁴ Respondents were allowed to nominate more than one reason, hence these percentage figures sum to more than 100.

Figure 1 shows the year of first emigration for Kosovan-Albanians who have completed or are currently studying for their PhD abroad. It shows that emigration was high in the early-mid 1990s, corresponding to the massive dismissals of Albanians under escalating Serbian repression, and the peak at the end of decade, during the war in Kosovo. The curve then starts to rise again from the early 2000s, related to emigration for education, as well as economic reasons.

Emigration for study purposes has been significantly boosted by the availability of scholarship schemes from host countries and their academic institutions, especially in the United States and Western Europe. Andra, who has a PhD from a UK university, says in her interview:

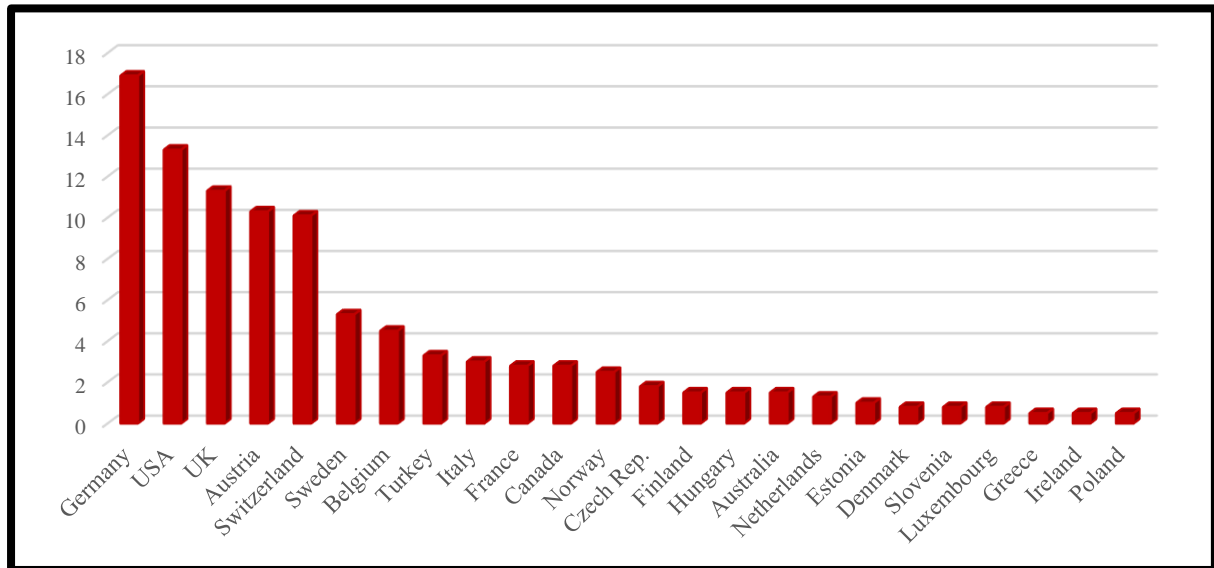
Because of specific circumstances, Kosovo has benefited greatly from scholarships and fellowships... It is more favoured than neighbouring countries because it is considered a country with a lot of major problems. This has helped Kosovo very much to increase its human capital.

But Andra does not go on to reflect what is the impact on Kosovo if this human capital stays abroad and does not return. Moreover, it also appears that it is the best-performing students, who are also able to master the relevant foreign languages, who are the ones most likely to leave, as Ardita, who left Kosovo in 2017 to pursue her university studies abroad, confirms:

The numbers of young people from Kosovo studying abroad have been trending upwards. Most of them got scholarships from various EU countries. Kosovo is a developing country, but its young people are bright, they speak English, they win scholarships to study abroad and they adapt easily.

Geographic distribution and onward mobility

While scattered across 25 countries around the globe, the Kosovan scientific diaspora, according to the online survey, is mainly concentrated in five countries – Germany (16.9 per cent), USA (13.3 per cent), UK (11.3 per cent), Austria (10.3 per cent) and Switzerland (10.1 per cent) – which together account for 62 per cent of the PhD-holders and PhD students abroad (see Figure 2) for the full array of destinations. The countries fall into three groups. The first consists of the traditional countries for Kosovan emigrants dating from the 1960s – principally Germany, Switzerland and Austria, but also France, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries. They host around 55 per cent of the surveyed sample. A second group, hosting 27 per cent, comprises anglophone countries – USA, UK, Canada. The remainder, 18 per cent, are scattered amongst a variety of countries mainly in southern (Italy, Greece, Turkey) and eastern Europe (Czechia, Poland, Slovenia).

Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo (in %)

Source: CESS, survey with Albanian PhDs from Kosovo, 2023

The destination countries are selected according to two main criteria: ‘the good name and reputation of the universities there’ (31.9 per cent) and ‘the possibility to work and study’ (25.4 per cent). Other notable factors are ‘knowing the language’ (14.6 per cent), ‘having a scholarship’ (10.8 per cent) and ‘having relatives/friends there’ (11.0 per cent). Here are two typical quotes from the interviews which illustrate some of these motives. First, Erëmira, who is a researcher in Switzerland:

I applied to many countries and was admitted to the PhD programme in several universities. But I chose [names research institute] which is ranked fourth in [my field] in Europe. Hence I came to this country because of the very good name of the institute.

And Dafina, who is doing her PhD in Germany, said:

Germany offers more options to find a job, if you need to work [to support your studies]... There are many people who have emigrated here and so everyone had a relative. It is also about scholarships. Through the DAAD, Germany offers more scholarships than other countries.

Geographic mobility between countries is another characteristic of the Albanian scientific diaspora in Kosovo. Generally, its members move among EU countries (plus Switzerland and the UK), or from a smaller country to a larger one with a more developed university system which offers a wider range of opportunities for scientific research and career progress. Typical mobility trajectories are from Turkey, Greece and some of the states of the former Yugoslavia towards Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, UK etc. Typical is the experience of Lura, who was able to do her bachelor and master’s degrees in Turkey, funded by scholarships, continuing with a paid PhD position in Sweden.

I applied for, and earned scholarships in several universities, but I chose the ones with the best conditions for me. After completing my bachelor's degree in Izmir and then my master's in Istanbul, I applied for a PhD programme in several universities in Western Europe. I chose Sweden because the university where I am studying for my PhD uses the most advanced research methods.

Table 2
First country of migration and current country of residence (%)

Country	First country	Current country	Change Kosovo	Change Albania
Austria	8.1	10.3	+2.2	-0.3
Belgium	3.1	4.5	+1.4	+0.7
Canada	1.4	2.8	+1.4	+4.2
France	4.5	2.8	-1.7	+0.8
Germany	15.6	16.9	+1.3	+1.0
Greece	1.9	0.5	-1.4	-7.9
Hungary	1.9	1.5	-0.4	n.a
Italy	3.6	3.0	-0.6	-10.9
Switzerland	6.7	10.1	+3.4	+1.4
Turkey	6.1	3.3	-2.8	-3.3
UK	9.5	11.3	+1.8	+2.4
US	13.6	13.4	-0.2	+10.1
(former) Yugoslavia	4.5	1.0	-3.5	n.a

Source: Authors' survey with PhD from Kosovo 2023; Gëdeshi and King 2018

Table 2 shows that, in this way, Turkey is a net 'loser' from this general pattern of onward migration, as are a few other countries (Greece, Italy, former Yugoslavia). The 'gainers' are the countries listed above (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, UK etc.) However, the scale of this inter-country mobility is relatively low, especially when compared to the results of our parallel study of the Albanian scientific diaspora carried out in 2018 (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021) where, for example, much larger net losses were registered by Greece and Italy, and larger gains by Canada and the USA (see the final column in Table 2).

Fields of study and employment abroad

Table 3 shows that the Kosovan scientific diaspora has studied (or are studying) across many fields of study and research. The three top fields are natural sciences, medicine and informatics, together comprising more than 60 per cent of all respondents to the survey. Table 3 also shows the comparison with Albania, in which the three fields nominated above are less important. This difference may be interpreted in two ways. The first is that the scientific diaspora from Kosovo is more *practical*: in other words, it is more oriented to labour demand and post-PhD employment opportunities, and towards programmes where sources of funding for scholarships and research grants are more available. The second interpretation has to do with *language*. It seems that Kosovan students are more likely to veer towards scientific programmes taught in English, whereas Albanian students, through a longer history of migratory involvement with

Italy, have a closer tie to that country's higher-education system, which is arguably less 'scientific'. Table 3 indicates that Albania's scientific diaspora is more evenly spread in terms of study fields than Kosovo's, with a greater focus on economics and business studies.

Table 3
Fields of study for the PhDs from Kosovo and Albania (%)

Fields of study	Kosovo	Albania	Difference
Social sciences (politics, sociology etc.)	16	19	-3
Natural sciences (biology, physics, maths)	23	18	+5
Economics and business studies	9	17	-8
Medical subject	20	14	+6
Engineering and construction	10	13	-3
Computing, informatics, electronics	18	10	+8
Other (law, architecture, languages etc.)	5	9	-4

Some of the above aspects relating to Kosovo's scientific diaspora are described by Butrint, who is now an academic in an Austrian university:

There are two aspects. The first is the idea in Kosovo that the best students in high school are encouraged to continue their studies in science or medicine. The reason is that they are offered better employment opportunities and salaries than those studying social sciences. The best students have higher aspirations and are more inclined to study abroad. Second, and most importantly, there is the possibility to study computer science in the English language in German-speaking countries. Unlike students from Albania who go to Italy, students from Kosovo go to German-speaking countries. I know many Albanians from Kosovo why study in other fields, such as economics, law etc., but for them integration in the labour market is more difficult.

It is also possible that the scientific diasporas from Kosovo and Albania, in cooperation with universities and scientific institutions, may somehow complement each other.

Moving on to current employment, a large majority of the survey respondents (78.4 per cent) works in the academic sector in universities, research institutes and scientific laboratories. The remainder are employed in private companies (13.3 per cent), non-scientific public institutions (4.4 per cent), NGOs (2.5 per cent) or work as self-employed and freelance professionals (0.6 per cent). One of the most interesting findings from the survey is that the vast majority – 96 per cent – of the PhDs have found jobs in universities, businesses, industries and administrative roles that match the level of their qualification. This result shows that, at the upper echelons of the scientific diaspora, i.e. at the PhD level, there is little or no 'brain waste'.

Ties with the homeland

The Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo, especially those who emigrated when they were adults, maintains strong material and spiritual connections with the home country. From the online survey, 90 per cent have regular contacts with Kosovo through various means of

communication – telephone, email, Skype, Facebook, etc. They retain these frequent links to parents, relatives, friends and former student and work colleagues. Gramoz, a university teacher in Austria, tells us about his connections:

I communicate with my family at least once a week through voice platforms, Skype or WhatsApp. I also communicate, every now and again, with my friends through the same means. Once a year, I go to Kosovo and visit my family, friends and former colleagues from the university. Many of my friends are now academics at the University of Prishtina. I also meet with my former professors. So, I try to maintain connections, even if over time some of them tend to weaken a bit.

According to the survey, 30 per cent of the respondents visit Kosovo once a year, like Gramoz; in addition, another 54 per cent visit more than once a year, during summer and then either at the end-of-year celebrations and/or at Easter time. As Kelmend, a university professor in Germany, says:

Albanians from Kosovo continue to visit their home country irrespective of the number of years they have been abroad... They are well aware that, with 3000-4000 euros, they could have luxurious holidays with families elsewhere, but they prefer to spend their money in Kosovo, for the sake of the country and of their relatives there.

The frequency and length of the visits depend on the distance that has to be travelled, the financial situation of the migrants and their available time alongside work and family commitments in the host country. It also depends on the strength of family ties and of emotional connections. As Gramoz indicated above, visits may become less frequent as the years pass, also because migrants become more socially integrated in the host country.

Most migrants visit Kosovo over the summer period. Erëmira remarks on the intensity of this summer-visiting phenomenon, calling it the *pilgrimage of the diaspora*:

In the summer months, we witness a pilgrimage of the diaspora in Kosovo. In July and August, all of the Albanian diaspora returns to Kosovo. People meet each other and create a kind of micro-society in the summer months.⁵

Meanwhile, a smaller share (12 per cent) visits Kosovo less frequently than once a year, due to the longer distance involved and the pressure of work commitments. Thus, Kaltrina, a university lecturer living with her family in Sweden, remarks:

We don't visit Kosovo every year, but every other year instead. The reason is that I have been very busy at the university and with the kids' engagements. All three of our children play football and the summer gets very busy with their sports activities. And the children start back at school very early here.

⁵ Erëmira's remark is interesting because, in the classic monograph on the phenomenon of migrants' visits 'home'. Baldassar (2001) refers to such visits as a 'secular pilgrimage'.

For North America, the distance factor is clearly more of a challenge. As Agron, a PhD researcher in the US, notes in his written response on the survey questionnaire: ‘Because of the long distance, I cannot visit Kosovo very often’.

The close family connections and frequent transnational contacts explain the significant and rising level of remittances sent to Kosovo. In the year 2021 they amounted to 1.15 billion euros, or 16 per cent of the country’s GDP, a sharp increase over the 516 million euros sent in 2012: more than doubling within one decade.⁶ Such remittances, usually sent direct to family members (parents, siblings etc.), are an important source of support for them. Doruntina, in Switzerland, says:

In Kosovo, it is common practice for a member of the family who might be in Switzerland or any other country, to continue to financially support maybe half the family, including brothers and sisters... or perhaps paying for the schooling of a nephew or niece.

Contacts with Kosovo, and with Albania, take place not only on a social level but also in the professional realm. The use of the Internet, regular communication and home-country visits enable the diaspora to be well-informed about political, economic and cultural trends and events taking place in Kosovo and Albania. Albanian-language TV channels are another important source of information, as well as some newspapers such as *Bota Sot* and *Koha Ditore*. Information about developments in Kosovo and Albania is also shared when members of the diaspora meet up and socialise with each other abroad.

Identity and belonging

Frequent contacts and continuous communication with the home country help members of the scientific diaspora preserve their Albanian identity and their belonging to Kosovo. This comes across in all the interviews conducted with members of the scientific diaspora in Europe and elsewhere. They first emphasise that ‘we are Albanians’ and then add ‘we are Albanians from Kosovo’. Thus, typically, Kushtrim, a PhD-holder who lives in Switzerland, says:

When asked about my nationality, I proudly say that I am Albanian. When they ask for more information, I say that I am an Albanian from Kosovo.

The Albanian identity has been passed from one generation to another and is the combined result of history, culture and geopolitics as well as conversations in family and social circles. A more complex interpretation than the one briefly stated by Kushtrim above is given by Gent, a PhD-holder who has been living in Austria for 14 years:

I consider myself to be an Albanian. For me the Kosovan identity is not stressed so much. That perhaps will change with the younger generations... Since I was a kid, like most of the Albanians, I was raised with the understanding that Kosovo has been

⁶ Figures from Gashi (2021), European Training Foundation (2021), updated from: https://bqk-kos.org/repository/docs/time_series/31%Remittances-by%20channel.xls

annexed by Serbia and that we are Albanians. For us, Kosovo is a region of Albania. Maybe the younger generations, being raised in the new state of Kosovo, they will be known more as Kosovans. Because of my Albanian identity, I am totally open to cooperate with universities in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Meanwhile Kaltrina, whom we cited above, continues with a more succinct interpretation:

Albania has been for me a sacred country... Albania projects a good feeling for me; it is like an older brother.

In addition to the above expressions of ethnic identity, members of the scientific diaspora also emphasise the state they belong to. Diellza, who has a PhD in social science and teaches at a university in Belgium, says:

It depends where and with whom I am. When I am amongst Balkan colleagues, especially colleagues from former Yugoslavia, I am always an Albanian. Meanwhile, at the university where I teach, I say I am a Kosovar, to tell them about the country I come from. To me, ethnic identity differs from the state identity. I am always Albanian first, then I say I am a Kosovar.

The identity and the interest for the home country, especially in distant host countries with smaller Albanian communities, weakens amongst the second-generation and 1.5-generation migrants. Our survey data show that these segments of the scientific diaspora have fewer contacts with Kosovo. They visit less frequently and have a smaller circle of relatives and friends there. Egzon, who is studying for his PhD in the US, confirms this pattern:

I call myself an Albanian. But those who came to the US many years ago, although they identify themselves as Albanians, they call themselves Americans as well.

Social capital

In their various host-country settings, members of the Kosovo-Albanian scientific diaspora generally enjoy a good level of social interaction with work colleagues and new friends. We might call this *individualised social capital* generated in the host society. According to our survey results, two-thirds of respondents have either 'very frequent' (36 per cent) or 'frequent' (30 per cent) contacts with work or study colleagues and the local community in the host country. Of course, such contacts have to be balanced with other commitments such as work and family. Ardian, a university academic in Austria, remarks:

I have frequent contacts with my university colleagues, mostly on a professional level. We invite each other over for dinner or a grill, but it is not that this happens every week...

Those with less social capital of this kind are usually PhD candidates in the early stages of their careers abroad.

Changing the scale of analysis from individual social capital to what we might call *structural social capital* – participation in Albanian organisations and networks – the outcomes are more limited. On this point, the survey respondents were asked: ‘Are you involved in any organisation of the Albanian diaspora in the host country?’ Only 21 per cent answered ‘Yes’; primarily these were organisations and networks of the following type – cultural (47 per cent), student (46 per cent), scientific (30 per cent) and political (11 per cent).⁷ Some of the associations referred to by the respondents are:

- Alb-Shkenca (Albanian Science), <https://alb-shkenca.org>⁸
- Vlora (Belgium), <https://www.vlora.net/>
- Business Network of the Albanian Diaspora (Switzerland), <https://rrbdsh.ch/>
- Association of Albanian Doctors in Germany
- Albanian Academics Network in the Netherlands
- Association of Albanian Doctors in Italy, <https://asmai.it/>
- Association ‘Dija’ (Knowledge) in Germany

A number of reasons help to explain the low involvement of the scientific diaspora in Albanian diaspora organisations and networks. In some countries, the Albanian scientific diaspora is small or dispersed across many cities; it therefore lacks the critical mass necessary to organise itself into associations or networks. Thus, Nriçim, a PhD candidate at a US university, says:

Here, there are only a few Albanians. Although the Albanian community in the US is large, in my town the Albanian population is very small. In the university where I work, there are only two other Albanians.

Some of the PhD candidates are busy with their research and exams, working in labs or doing part-time teaching or other work to support their studies. Others have limited personal contacts and do not know any Albanian associations in the place where they live. Ermal, who is about to finish his PhD in the US, says:

I have not participated in Albanian associations because I had no free time. I have had to work long hours in the lab for my PhD, and I had many exams... In addition, I do not know of any Albanian organisation in my city.

⁷ These figures refer to the shares of the 21 per cent who answered ‘Yes’ to this survey question; naturally, some respondents could check more than one type of association.

⁸ Alb-Shkenca, mentioned by many participants, is arguably the oldest and the largest Albanian scientific diaspora organisation, with around 400-500 members. It brings together Albanian scholars and scientists from around the world, comprising Albanian-speaking scientists of the diaspora from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro. Within the pages of their bulletin, *Buletini Alb-Shkenca*, and online, the associations’ members discuss the current challenges of advancing science, research and scholarship in their home country and many express their commitment to volunteering to help the development of science and technology in Albania, Kosovo etc.

Some respondents and interviewees say that they participate in discipline-specific or research-based scientific and professional associations in the host country or in international networks. This allows PhDs, lecturers and research scientists to establish contacts and cooperation opportunities with people in their professional specialism from all over the world, thereby raising their scientific profile. This form of social capital is also beneficial to Kosovo, linking the country to international experts and networks in various sectors.

Kosovo's embassies and diplomatic representatives in host countries can also play an instrumental role in fostering relations among the scientific diaspora and in linking it to the homeland. This requires them to have an up-to-date database for the Albanian scientific diaspora (from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro) as well as the financial and human resources to engage with it. Representatives of the Albanian scientific diaspora could be involved in embassy-hosted celebrations, business meetings and consultations, where they could be informed about new economic, political and social developments in Kosovo as well as have the opportunity to meet each other and create networks and associations. Diplomatic representatives may act as mediators between the scientific diaspora and universities and scientific institutions in Kosovo. As an example of a positive initiative, here is an extract from the interview with one Kosovo Ambassador in December 2021:

I initiated the setting up of a network of the [Kosovan] scientific community in Sweden... I had noticed that we have quite good numbers here, also in terms of the gender balance, almost fifty-fifty. Since we have such a solid number of people in the scientific community, I proposed the setting up of a network. The embassy of Kosovo could serve as a platform for them to be interconnected, establish contacts and organise events and other activities to promote their scientific work and, at the same time, the image of Kosovo. This initiative has been well received and on 21 January [2022] we will have an official event with the Albanian scientific diaspora from all the Albanian-speaking countries and places, because the [Albanian] diaspora has a compact composition and should not be separated... If this proves successful, I will try to replicate it with other countries. Soon, I will make a working visit to Lithuania and will meet Albanian PhDs there... I will propose this idea to other Ambassadors of the Republic of Kosovo in other countries which host an Albanian scientific diaspora.⁹

According to other interviews, however, there are many cases of no contacts between members of the scientific diaspora and diplomatic staff. Shpend, a PhD candidate of the Kosovan second generation in Germany, says:

I live in Stuttgart and there is an Albanian consulate there. We do not live far from it but we never got into contact with the consulate because we do not know how to go about it.

⁹ According to the website of the Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Sweden, a network has been established following the meeting organised with representatives of the Albanian scientific community in Sweden. For information see: 'The network of the Albanian scientific community in Sweden is established' at <https://www.ambasada-ks.net/se/?page=1,8,114> (in Albanian).

Mobilising the scientific diaspora

Many countries around the world – amongst which Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, India, China, South Korea and Colombia – have been paying close attention to their respective scientific diasporas, which they want to mobilise and organise for the benefit of the home country (Kuznetsov 2006; Tejada 2012). The trend is well-illustrated by referencing post-socialist near-neighbour countries to Kosovo. When the post-socialist transition started in Hungary, it made efforts to activate the network of Hungarian emigrant scientists who were estimated to represent 12 per cent of the country’s scientific potential (Portnoff 1996). In the early 2000s, a group of Romanian scientists established the Ad-Astra network to support the renaissance of the research sector in Romania (Nedelcu 2008). And in neighbouring Albania, the Albanian American Development Fund (AADF), starting in 2022, aims to award scholarships for internships of up to six months over a seven-year period for around 100 members of the Albanian scientific diaspora to come to Albania and contribute their expertise to the country’s public universities and scientific institutions.¹⁰

This ongoing trend for home countries to cooperate with emigrant academics and scientists has shifted somewhat the tenor of the debate on brain drain towards a more collaborative approach, replacing brain drain with ‘brain circulation’ and ‘brain return’.

There are two main ways in which the scientific diaspora can contribute to the socio-economic and intellectual development of Kosovo. The first is via return migration. The return of highly qualified emigrants who have studied and worked in universities, laboratories and scientific institutions in advanced OECD countries would introduce new ideas, knowledge and skills, rendering academic and scientific life in Kosovo more dynamic. However, for return to take place, certain conditions have to be met, which are further considered in a later section of this paper. The second means for the diaspora to contribute to the scientific development of Kosovo is cooperation with universities and research institutes, also considered in more detail below. Of course, both forms of action – return and cooperation – can be put in place simultaneously.

Return

Return to Kosovo, especially after the end of the war there in the late 1990s, has been a constant and dynamic process. Many talented and experienced individuals with PhDs from European or North American universities have returned to Kosovo and work, generally with a high level of dedication, in public and private universities, scientific institutions, civil-society organisations, public administration, and so on.

We asked respondents in the online survey whether they intended to return to Kosovo. Around 34.4 per cent answered ‘Yes’, 20.2 per cent said ‘No’ and the majority, 45.4 per cent, responded ‘I haven’t decided yet’; these being the three options on the questionnaire. Interestingly, the desire to return to Kosovo is twice as high as the desire expressed by the Albanian scientific diaspora from Albania, 17.1 per cent (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021), indicating a greater ‘loyalty’ on the part of the Kosovan scientific diaspora, even if the overall

¹⁰ See <https://www.aadf.org/project/general-news/#launching-event-oforead-program-research-expertise-from-the-academic-diaspora>

figure, representing just over 1 in 3, is not that high. Moreover, an affirmative statement in the online survey does not mean that the return will actually happen. Often, the gap between intention and action is quite wide, as we have observed in other surveys we have carried out (King and Gëdeshi 2020).

Another question in the survey asked about the institutions that potential returnees would like to work in. A menu of types of institution was presented and the answers are as follows (respondents could check more than one): public universities (checked by 91.4 per cent), private universities (63.1 per cent), scientific institutions (62.0 per cent), and international organisations (50.8 per cent) were the four main employment targets; followed by smaller shares checking NGOs/think-tanks (29.4 per cent), private companies (23.5 per cent), freelancing (13.4 per cent) and public administration (11.8 per cent).

A further question probed the reasons why respondents want or intend to return to Kosovo. Several hypothetical reasons were listed and again, respondents could check more than one. It is well-known in migration studies that decisions to return are often more complex and finely balanced than the decision to emigrate in the first place (King 2000). Usually return takes place for a combination of factors which may be in tension with each other. For instance, family obligations may be in contradiction with the economic situation, with low salaries in universities and scientific institutions. One indicator of the difficulties of pinning down single reasons for return is that the ‘other reasons’ option in the questionnaire was the most frequently checked – by 43.8 per cent of respondents. Beyond this, two more concrete reasons to return are noted: the first was that the purpose of the emigration was to study and then return after PhD graduation (32.2 per cent), and the second was family pressures to return (29.8 per cent). Under the ‘other’ category, respondents were invited to write their own free-text answers, and many referred to a desire to ‘contribute something’ or ‘give back’ to their home country. Thus, Ermelinda from Sweden writes:

The inherent desire of a person [is] to contribute to his or her home country. This pushes me to come to Kosovo and Albania. I want to share my knowledge and I know that there are very good students [to teach] in Kosovo and Albania.

The interviews with members of the scientific diaspora open up other reasons as well, along with more nuanced accounts of combinations of reasons. In the following interview extract, Marigona, a researcher in social sciences at a European university, relates return primarily to the state-building processes under way in Kosovo, as well as the challenges of making progress in the fiercely competitive European academic labour market:

The return is primarily related to state-formation processes in Kosovo. We were 13 students from Kosovo who were following the PhD programme here. I am the only one who stayed on; the other 12 all returned to Kosovo... Patriotism was the primary reason for their return. Secondly, irrespective of achievements, it is not easy to climb the ladder of success in Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin or London where there is a high concentration of the best professionals in the world. Competition is very high here. There is no middle way; it’s either make or break. In Kosovo and Albania, there is a shortage of good academics. If you have a PhD, you have chances of getting a post.

Similar, but also some different, perspectives are articulated by Mirlind, a PhD student in Norway, who says:

I see potential for development in Kosovo. I am currently researching my PhD and my wish is to return to Kosovo. I do not know when exactly... Kosovo is my country that has recently been in a war. Although I see that the chances to test and develop my ideas here in the host country are greater than in Kosovo, I see an obligation toward Kosovo and to take back the knowledge I acquire here. Of course, one factor for my return is my family there, but mostly it is the patriotic factor. I learn new things, but I always think how to relate it to Kosovo, what I can do to contribute to Kosovo, and Albania.

In many cases, the projected contribution is related to the specific fields of training and expertise of the survey and interview participants, such as education, health, scientific research, business and management studies, or politics and international relations. Also – as Mirlind does above – it is not just Kosovo but also Albania that is mentioned as a place to return to.

The new democratic processes in Kosovo, the ongoing fight against corruption and the prospect of visa liberalisation create hope for the future and encourage the desire to return. Nita, also from Norway, says:

In Kosovo, we see the future with optimism... we think that things will get much better. We know we are in an experimental state, in transition, but we very much hope that it will become better. Visa liberalisation will allow us to travel freely, visit and get to see each other, and open our minds. We hope that our country will become more democratic, based on democratic institutions, although change will come gradually... The new government is campaigning against corruption and organised crime, which are challenges for all Western Balkan countries. This gives us hope that things will gradually change for the better.¹¹

Other interviewees expanded on the specifics of what they saw as a bright political future since the victory of the Self-Determination Movement in recent elections and the coming to power of its leader Albin Kurti in 2021; here is a long extract from the interview with PhD-holder Qëndresa, who lives in Switzerland.

Some of the Albanian [Kosovan] youth, after the victory of Kurti, would like to return to Kosovo. As a family, i.e. my husband and I, although we both have our jobs in Switzerland, after the victory of Kurti we are considering returning, which has not been an option for me before... This is a difficult decision as it requires us to put collective interests above personal considerations. However, I think that, unless we return, especially those of us who have studied abroad and trained abroad, I so not see how

¹¹ This feeling of optimism expressed by potential returnees to Kosovo contrasts with the view from the Albanian scientific diaspora who, although wanting to return at emotional level, in practice are reluctant to do so because they see ‘no future in Albania’ (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021).

Kosovo will have the capacity to advance at an adequate pace within a short period of time... Was it easy for Albin [Kurti]? Because he is the first hope to curb corruption. If I return to Kosovo and, based on the merit of my qualifications and achievements, I am offered a job, I am aware that my salary will be much lower than in Switzerland, but the motivation for that job is much stronger. I mean, I know I am returning for a purpose, that does not involve corruption, the misuse and abuse [of people, resources etc.]. We must trust Albin to a certain extent... He is paving the way for us to help our country, to make a sacrifice, but with the assurance that corruption will not be a big problem on this journey.

However, we must always remember the possible disjuncture between, on the one hand, intentions and the rhetoric or ideology of return, and, on the other hand, the actual return move taking place. Only a small share of the online survey respondents say that they intend to return within the next six months (2.4 per cent); 9.8 per cent answer that they will return within one year, 17.9 per cent within 2-3 years, and 19.5 per cent within 3-5 years. This is mainly related to the time it takes to complete a PhD. Most of the potential returnees nominate 5-10 years for their return (20.3 per cent), or after 10 years (3.3 per cent), but 26.8 per cent declare they 'don't know' when they will return. Thus Blina, who studies in Sweden, says:

For now, I do not know exactly when I will return, although I am constantly faced with this question. In Sweden, there are very good opportunities to advance my career after the PhD. But, also in Kosovo there are good chances for me to help my country and advance my career. Both pathways are appealing, but I have not made my decision yet.

Others say that they want to stay longer in the host country to enhance their experience before contemplating return to Kosovo. This is the case for Jona, who is doing her PhD in Switzerland:

Upon completing my PhD, I do not intend to return immediately to Kosovo. I like Geneva very much and I think it offers many opportunities for professional development. If I were to return immediately to Kosovo, that would mean that I hadn't made use of these opportunities. It's true that I have been able to work alongside doing my PhD, but I still think it's too early to return. On the other hand, I will not break my ties with Kosovo; I just want to stay a few more years in Switzerland to consolidate my experience.

Such experience can be gained by applying for a post-doctoral position (a 'postdoc'). Nita, who is studying in Norway, when asked about when she plans to return, responded:

After completing my PhD, I will apply for a postdoc. It's true, available positions are very limited, but I will try... In Kosovo or Albania, I think I will find a job. But to advance my skills, I need to find a postdoc... Then I should like to return to Kosovo, to the University of Prishtina, first of all because there is a shortage of academic staff... Albania would also be an option...

For certain professions, the duration of stay before return may be even longer. For example, Flaka has started her PhD in medicine in a well-known medical school at a university in Central Europe. She says:

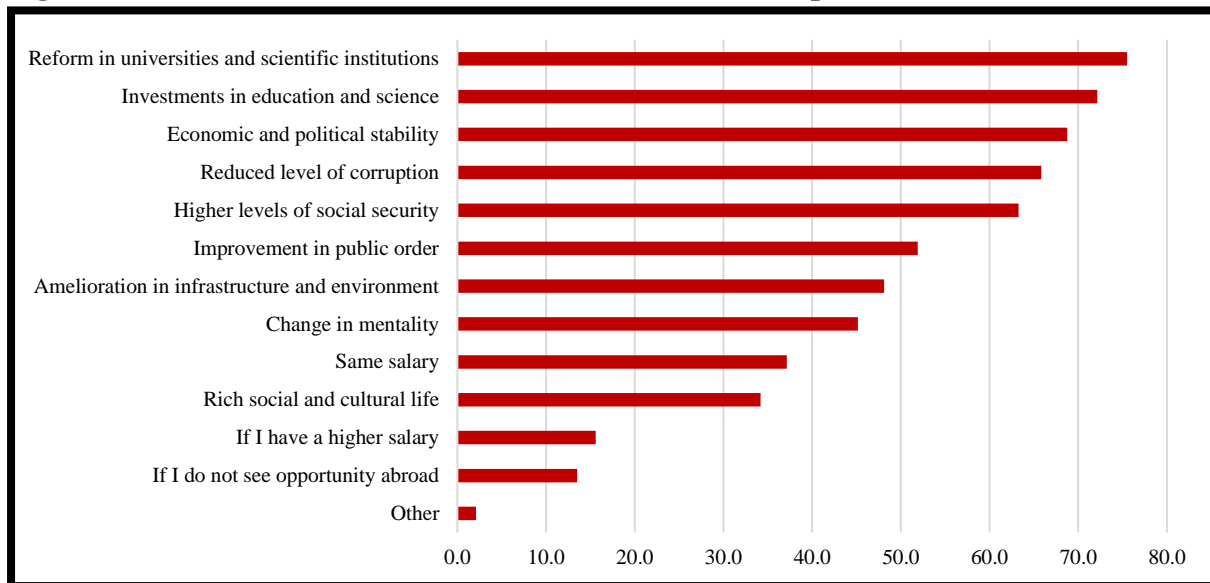
I do not plan to return to Kosovo before I finish my specialisation. It may take, depending on how things go, 4-5 years at least. That means, it will take three years to finish my PhD, then 4-5 years of specialisation. Or it may take another two years to get more experience. You never know how things will turn out. So if I return, it might be only after 10 years.

The return of members of the scientific diaspora could be a key stimulant for Kosovo's socio-economic development, both in general and with specific reference to the sector of higher education and scientific research. In the majority of cases, returning members of the scientific diaspora have more knowledge, more specialised training and are more confident and creative than their peers who have only studied in Kosovo. Furthermore, the diaspora-trained academics and scientists will have studied in one or more foreign languages, been exposed to more 'modern' teaching methods and research techniques, and will be more interculturally aware than their non-migrant colleagues. Examples from other countries reinforce these assertions. In an earlier era, the return of foreign-trained academics and researchers to Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong was followed by a doubling of scientific articles over a five-year period (Gaillard and Gaillard 1998). A similar phenomenon was noted in another study on China, where the return of scientists who had studied in the US and other English-speaking countries was, again, followed by an increase in scientific output and academic standards in Chinese universities (Fangmeng 2016).

Survey respondents who had not yet decided whether to return were asked about the pre-conditions that would need to be met in Kosovo in order for them to decide to return. The questionnaire presented them with a series of factors, of which they could check more than one. The pattern of responses is set out in Figure 3. Five factors scored over 50 per cent: reform of the universities and scientific institutions (75.5 per cent), increased investments in education and science (72.2 per cent), economic and political stability (68.8. per cent), reduced levels of corruption (65.8 per cent), higher levels of social security (63.3. per cent) and improvement in public order (51.9 per cent). Other pre-conditions, less important but mostly still significant to note, are listed in Figure 3. Taken in the round, there are two main groups of pre-conditioning factors: the first relates to reform and investment in the tertiary education system, and the second is a cluster of factors around the wider social and political system. Interestingly, the salary issue is not regarded as pre-eminent.

A typical view on this was articulated by Majlinda, who works in a scientific institute in Switzerland:

The salary is a personal matter. Of course, there are people whose main objective is to make money. But for me, knowing that I would be contributing to my country, in science for example, the salary is not so important. In Switzerland, it is true, my future pathway is clear – but I would be contributing to a foreign country.

Figure 3. Pre-conditions for the return of the scientific diaspora

Source: CESS, survey with Albanian PhDs from Kosovo, 2023

Forms of cooperation

Given the headline results presented earlier that only about one-third of the Kosovan scientific diaspora *do* intend to return, that one-fifth intend *not* to return, and that 45 per cent are *undecided* (a share of whom will likely *not* return, given the evidence of other studies on ‘potential’ migration), we turn our attention now to another approach. This is that the most *realistic* way for the scientific diaspora to contribute to the development of Kosovo is via ‘remote’ cooperation with universities, scientific institutions, NGOs, business and government.

In the online survey, we asked respondents ‘During your years abroad, have you cooperated with universities and scientific institutions in Kosovo?’ Just over a quarter (26 per cent) replied ‘Yes’, 71 per cent replied ‘No’, with a residual 3 per cent not answering the question. Whilst the cooperation took many forms, nearly all are sporadic or one-off rather than long-term or structural. Typical forms of collaboration mentioned include giving visiting lectures, participation in conferences and workshops, writing co-authored articles, joint projects and data collection, and consultancy work for the government, NGOs and private firms. According to the follow-up interviews, such cooperations usually arose out of personal connections and individual initiatives rather than being structured by cross-national institutional collaboration. Fjolla, a professor in a Western European university, shares her experiences:

I try though my personal connections in Kosovo and Albania to be as active as possible. Recently, I presented my book... Just in this last year, I have lectured twice in universities in Kosovo. In previous years, I have had similar visiting experiences. Also, together with researchers from Kosovan universities, we published a book in 2019 on development in Kosovo.

A more critical assessment of collaborative initiatives is given by Vlora, a researcher in a Nordic country:

I must be honest: connections with universities in Kosovo are established only by my personal initiative. For the moment, there is a project I started and wrote, and we receive support from the EU. Two universities in Kosovo and two in Albania are benefiting from this project. But I have never been contacted by any Kosovan institutions... I visit Kosovo regularly, but I have never been invited to speak in front of students... Whatever happens in Kosovo [where I am involved] is because of my initiative, and you need to push hard in order to achieve anything. On their side, towards me, there has been no initiative.

Clearly, there is enthusiasm and willingness to cooperate with the home country on the part of the Kosovan diaspora, even if it has mainly been via their own personal initiatives. According to our study, 92 per cent express a desire to cooperate with universities and scientific institutions in Kosovo, only 2 per cent say they do not wish to cooperate and the remainder did not answer the question. Many see such cooperation as an obligation. In the words of Marigo, who lives in an EU country:

I have lots of energy and a great desire to contribute to Kosovo. Why? Because I am a ‘child of war’; I am a child who has been part of the process of state formation. I feel an obligation to contribute towards the future of Kosovo.

Table 4

Desired forms of cooperation with universities and scientific institutions

Desired form of cooperation	%
Participation in joint research projects	84.9
Courses of lectures	73.7
Participation in conferences and workshops	69.7
Co-authored publications	64.9
Consultancy for the public or private sectors	60.3
Participation in summer schools	52.9
Training programmes	44.3
PhD supervision and mentioning	42.3
Other	2.6

Regarding the various forms of collaboration, we presented a list of what we thought were the possible forms of activity in the online questionnaire, and the answers are set out in Table 4. Respondents could check more than one activity. Top of the list of desired types of cooperation are those mentioned already: joint projects, visiting lectures, conferences and co-authored publications. The desire to cooperate is often linked to the type of experience acquired abroad. This is illustrated by Shqipe, who is completing her PhD in a university in Central Europe:

My PhD is on neuroscience. After completing it, I would like to specialise in surgery. This would give me an opportunity to go to Kosovo for a few days every month to contribute to one of the clinics there.

Obstacles to cooperation and return

Notwithstanding the desire to cooperate and the initiatives undertaken, collaboration between the scientific diaspora and the homeland faces challenges, which have also been noted in our earlier work on Albania (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021) and in research in other countries (Teferra 2005). Our Kosovan research participants find these obstacles discouraging and make them think twice about trying further initiatives in the future. Obstacles arise in two main areas. The most obvious is finance. Where does the money come from to finance diaspora–homeland cooperation? The second is arguably more difficult to fix; this is the lack of interest on the part of universities and scientific bodies in Kosovo, noted by Vlora above. Marigo, also quoted above, enlarges on this issue based on her experience, which includes a diagnosis of jealousy on the part of the home institution’s managers and personnel.

I have been invited to various EU countries and to China to deliver lectures, but never in Kosovo. This is painful. I do not know whether it is because of ignorance, or if it is an Albanian phenomenon... I am always ready to deliver a keynote speech or a lecture or give an opinion on the development of the country... I think that they [Kosovan academics] have a problem when they see that someone has made progress, has more knowledge... because they want to stick to their own people and ideas. The more those who do not know much stick together, the stronger they think they are. When someone with a new idea or a new approach arrives, they see this newcomer as a threat and that person is kept out... They are afraid of people with new ideas, so they are reluctant to cooperate... They find it difficult to work with someone who has more energy, more knowledge, who wants to introduce the latest techniques and developments.

As a result of this climate of jealousy and exclusion towards would-be returnee academics and scientists and towards collaboration with emigré Kosovan experts, some who have returned have ended up by re-emigrating. This is the experiences of Kushtrim, currently a professor in a Scandinavian country.

I returned to Kosovo in 2006, after I completed my PhD. But it would have been easier if I had gone to another country at the end of the world, say New Zealand or Australia, and started from scratch there, than coming back to Kosovo... When I returned, I had the desire and the energy [to do something] but now I don’t... It has been extremely difficult to get an academic job in Kosovo... I had to take a job with an NGO, a bottom-level job. The first year was very hard... I had no support, and faced many obstacles. The reason is that Kosovan institutions are unwilling to attract talent from the diaspora, because this generates competition. A professor who has never published anything internationally, only two or three articles in Kosovo or North Macedonia, is afraid of the competition from those who have studied abroad.

These interview excerpts clearly show that sustainable and long-term cooperation between the scientific diaspora and universities in Kosovo requires deep institutional reforms and a change in mentality. This can be accelerated through government action. Kushtrim continues:

The institutions are the problem, but the institutions are also the solution. We hope that the new government will be more open, more constructive and more active in attracting knowledge from abroad, to reverse the trend from *brain drain* towards *brain gain* [he emphasises these words]. I hope that happens sooner rather than later... [Future] cooperation also requires a friendly and open environment on the side of the scientific institutions in Kosovo, including their readiness to respond to initiatives proposed by individuals and groups from the scientific diaspora.

The second main obstacle is related to the financial aspect. In spite of the willingness of some members of the scientific diaspora to volunteer their time free of charge, the finance necessary to support visits (travel costs, accommodation etc.) may not be available from existing university budgets (Kačaniku et al. 2018). On the other hand, technological advancements mean that some forms of activity – lectures, PhD supervision, preparing joint articles etc. – can easily be done online. This new technology (actually, now not so new) can boost the intensity of communication and keep financial costs down.

Scientific cooperation from the diaspora can also be funded by foundations, international organisations and governments, in order to support short-stay visits for teaching, summer schools and research planning and execution. This requires both the sending and the host universities to foster an open and cooperative environment and ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place.

We suggest two important reasons why the cooperation of the scientific diaspora with universities and scientific institutions in Kosovo should be accelerated. First, the contribution of the diaspora will quicken the pace of social, economic and political development in Kosovo. Without the injection of expertise from abroad, intellectual and scientific development runs the risk of stagnating in Kosovo. This is the view of Ejona, who had a PhD in political science from Belgium:

I think that unless we return, those of us who have studied and trained abroad, I do not see Kosovo having the capacity to advance at an adequate pace within a short period of time. One way for a quicker rate of progress to be achieved is for us, who have worked abroad, to return to contribute to Kosovo's development.

Second, there is the need to respect the feelings of obligation to help Kosovo shared by many of our survey respondents and interviewee participants, many of whom called for increasing cooperation and impetus from themselves in the scientific diaspora. This obligation to contribute may fade over time, and so should be acted upon whilst it is still strong. Here we pick up the interview of Marigo, cited above, who continues:

I feel deep down in me that I owe Kosovo. But this sense of obligation towards the homeland may not be present in my children. They will not have this sense of duty. They will only know the Albanian language and that Kosovo is the home country of their parents. I am afraid that we will be the last generation to think this way. I wonder why our capacities and energies are not being used...

Conclusions and recommendations

The Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosovo is new, rapidly growing, and concentrated in the more advanced countries of Europe and in North America. Its members are distributed widely across all academic fields and most of them are employed in universities, research labs and other scientific institutions. From that point of view, we cannot speak of a *brain waste*. The members of the scientific diaspora appear to possess a high level of social capital at the level of individual-based social networks, both within the host country and with the Kosovan homeland, but what we have termed ‘structural social capital’ (more formal networks, associations and organisations) is low. Members of the scientific diaspora retain a strong sense of their Kosovan-Albanian identity and belonging. Although their desire to return is relatively high (especially when compared to their Albanian expatriate neighbours), cooperation is the main pathway for them to contribute to Kosovo’s development.

The size of the Kosovan scientific diaspora is enlarged if we take into account the respective scientific diasporas of Albanian and the Albanian-speaking populations of North Macedonia and Montenegro. This wider Albanian-speaking geographical area is also relevant in discussions of return and cooperation. Beyond the descriptive quantitative data distilled from the online survey, two discursive themes were prominent in the interview data: these were the *patriotic willingness, indeed the sense of obligation, to return and/or cooperate from a distance*; and secondly, *feelings of optimism and hope for the future of Kosovo*, once certain changes take place to restore a better atmosphere of social justice in the homeland.

We conclude by making the following recommendations, which echo those we made in our earlier study focused on Albania (Gëdeshi and King 2018, 2021).

First, we propose the creation of a *databank* on Albanian PhD-holders and researchers from Kosovo, which should be integrated with similar records of Albanian-speaking PhDs from Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Preshevo (Albanian-speakers in a small border area of Serbia). Many countries across the globe are working on a similar initiative. The databank should include socio-demographic data, fields and levels of study and qualifications obtained, skills and expertise, employment record, university career, current position, desire to return, readiness to cooperate and forms of collaboration envisaged. It should be continuously updated in order to reflect the rapid evolution of the Albanian-language scientific diaspora in Europe, North America and beyond. The databank will create a mapping of the scientific diaspora available to universities, scientific institutions, think-tanks and the government and its public administration to draw on this pool of qualified professionals and to benefit from their contributions, either through return migration or shorter-term visits and collaborations.

Second, members of the scientific diaspora should be facilitated to fulfil their wishes to contribute to the development of Kosovo by training students, delivering lectures and short

courses, cooperation in joint research, carry out consultancies for the government, international organisations and private businesses and foundations, amongst others.

Third, cooperation with the scientific diaspora should be supported by Kosovo's embassies, especially in countries where there are many Kosovan scientists and researchers, such as Germany, the US, Switzerland, Austria, France, Belgium, Sweden, Norway etc. The embassies should maintain regular contact with representatives of the scientific diasporas, invite them to relevant meetings and other events, and keep them informed about economic, social, academic and political developments in the home country.

Fourth, the government of Kosovo, in cooperation with universities and other scientific bodies, should create an open and welcoming environment so that it is easier for diaspora academics and researchers to return, either to take up long-term appointments or engage in short-term visits for a variety of productive purposes. This requires a change in mentality towards perceived 'outsiders' and what they can contribute. An effective cooperation between the scientific diaspora and universities and scientific institutions should stimulate the return of some diaspora members to the home country and revitalise its academic and scientific quality and diversity.

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