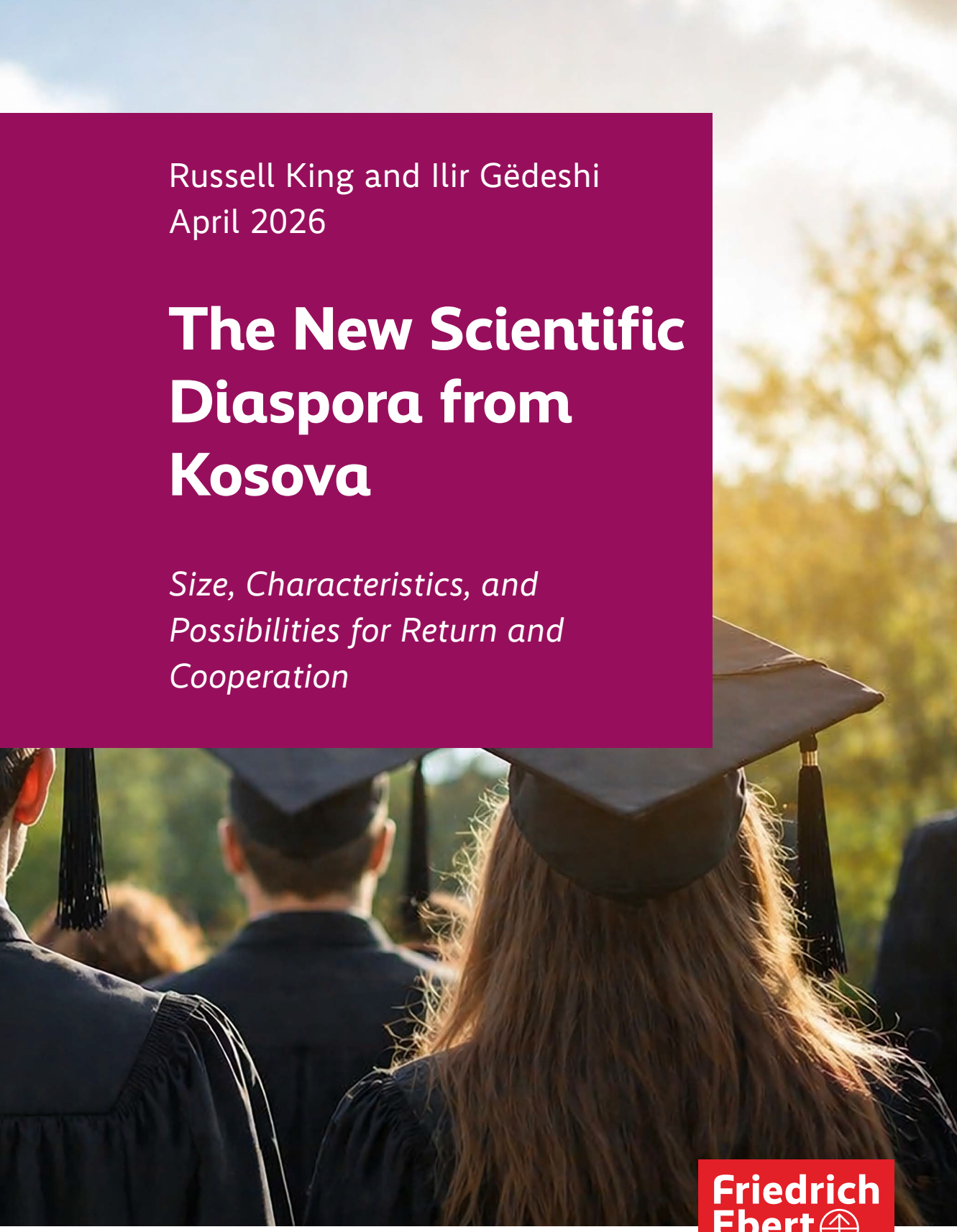
Russell King and Ilir Gëdeshi
April 2026

The New Scientific Diaspora from Kosova

Size, Characteristics, and Possibilities for Return and Cooperation



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Abbreviations

AADF	Albanian American Development Fund
CESS	Center for Economic and Social Studies
ETF	European Training Foundation
EVS	European Value Study
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	The United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America
WB	The World Bank

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The Authors

Introducing the concept of 'scientific diaspora'

Set within ongoing debates around the complex relationships between migration and development – the so-called migration–development nexus (Van Hear and Sørensen, 2003) – the issue of brain drain, or the emigration of highly educated personnel, has both economic and moral dimensions. Part of the migration–development nexus envisages positive impacts on the poorer, migrant-sending countries. By leaving to escape unemployment, low incomes and poverty, emigrants find better-paid work and are able to send back remittances to support their families and communities back home. Then, at some future date, the argument goes, the emigrants return with saved capital and enhanced skills to input into the development process in their countries of origin. By contrast, the phenomenon of brain drain is part of the darker side of the migration–development dynamic, and seen to be highly damaging to poor countries which can hardly afford the loss of scarce and expensively-trained human capital to richer countries (Bhaghwati, 1979). There is an important ethical argument here: put simply, is it fair that, by paying for the upbringing, education and training of their 'brightest and best', poor countries then see their brains recruited to drive the development of richer countries? King (2018) described this as a form of development aid donated by poor to rich countries.

By leaving to escape unemployment, low incomes and poverty, emigrants find better-paid work and are able to send back remittances to support their families and communities back home

In this report, rather than follow the generally negative and arguably emotive term 'brain drain', we advance the more positive and open notion of 'scientific diaspora' which has become more current – though not yet widespread – in development-studies literature since about 2000 (see, for instance, 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 alternative to brain drain, even if traditional diaspora scholars would demur that it does not fit the canonical definition of a diaspora as a traumatic exile and scattering which develops over long periods of

historical time and is characterised by the maintenance of ethnic boundaries (see Brubaker, 2005; Clifford, 1993; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991).

This study follows in the footsteps of an earlier study the authors carried out in 2018 on the Albanian scientific diaspora (Gëdeshi and King, 2018). In that study, and in this one too, we defined the scientific diaspora by the simple criterion of possession of, or studying for, a PhD degree; and currently working or studying abroad. The current paper replicates most elements of the survey methodology of the 2018 survey, and the results are presented in a similar way – which also enables us to make some comparisons between the findings for Kosova and Albania. The present paper is an expanded and updated version of a Working Paper based on a smaller sample of respondents published two years ago (King and Gëdeshi, 2024)

In view of the high level of human capital involved – people trained in universities and research centres, often in specialised subjects such as medicine, science, engineering, IT and business – the scientific diaspora is thought to have a much higher development potential for the home country than other segments of the country's emigrant population. Theoretically, this impact is actioned via two processes. The first and most obvious is return migration, which can involve the transfer of know-how, technology, skills, experience and new ideas, leading to the overall modernisation and development of society and the economy. If return does not take place, then the second mechanism kicks in, which consists of the 'mobilisation of the diaspora' to provide development inputs via investment, short-term visits (for instance for training or research) and virtual collaboration. To be effective, policies to favour return and cooperation need to be implemented by both countries involved in the transfer of knowledge, skills, and expertise, i.e. the host country and the country of origin (Gëdeshi and King, 2021).

With the above introduction in mind, we now specify the main question guiding our study: What role can the scientific diaspora play in enhancing the economic and social development of Kosova?

This general research aim breaks down into six more specific questions, which we respond to by providing empirical evidence from a mix of quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (interviews) methods. The guiding questions are::

1. What is the size of the scientific diaspora from Kosova?Si është e shpërndarë ajo në vendet e destinacionit dhe a po ndryshon kjo shpërndarje gjeografike?

2. How is it distributed across destination countries, and is this geography changing?

3. What are the diaspora's educational and employment characteristics?

4. What human and social capital does the scientific diaspora possess?

5. What is the likelihood of return, and what preconditions, obstacles and opportunities frame the return decision?

6. Failing return, what are the actual and potential forms of cooperation between the scientific diaspora and academic, scientific and business institutions in Kosova?

Before answering these questions on the basis of our survey and interview findings, two important contextual sections follow here immediately below: some background on the history of emigration from Kosova; and the methods used to collect our research data.

Migration from Kosova

According to a recent World Bank publication, Kosova is among the top five countries in the world in terms of the scale and intensity of emigration relative to its population (World Bank, 2024). Although it is difficult to determine with precision the dimensions of emigration and the Kosovar diaspora, estimates can be made on the basis of data provided by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës or ASK). The 2011 Census reported that the Kosovar diaspora consisted of 704,000 individuals – 550,000 emigrants and an additional 154,000 persons born abroad to at least one Kosovar parent (ASK, 2014). Between 2012 and 2024, net migration from Kosova amounted to 290,070 people. Consequently, the total size of the Kosovar diaspora reaches approximately 994,070 individuals – and slightly more than one million if we also include children born abroad to emigrants after 2011. This figure corresponds to almost two-thirds of the country's resident population and places Kosova among the nations with the largest diasporas in the world relative to population size (World Bank, 2024). The Kosovar diaspora is primarily concentrated in Germany (over 50 per cent) and Switzerland, with smaller communities in Italy, Austria, Sweden, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia, and Finland.

The diaspora from Kosova 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 Kosova's history and tradition (Blaku, 1996). Set alongside the larger and well-documented case of Albanian migration, that from Kosova 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 Kosova during this period, let alone for Albanians as a separate ethnic group (Vathi and Black, 2007).

Based on the existing literature and in relation to the purpose of this study, we may divide emigration from Kosova since the 1960s into four stages.

The first starts in the late 1960s and is the so-called 'guest-worker' stage when young men, poorly educated, low-skilled, and mainly from rural or marginalised urban areas, migrated to Western Europe for factory, construction, mining and metal work. Germany and Switzerland were the main destination countries, but some migrants also went to Austria, France and Belgium. The emigrants were without families and often lived in barracks with other foreign workers (Dahinden, 2005). It is estimated that in 1981 there were around 27,000 emigrants from Kosova living in these countries, while an additional 50,000 emigrated during the period 1981–1987 (Jusufi and Ukaj, 2020). 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 Kosova. At the end of this stage, 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 Kosova as its political status within the former Yugoslavia improved (Gashi, 2021). During this period, other individuals migrated to major industrial centres within the former Yugoslavia, primarily to Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they were employed in heavy and low-skilled labour (Gollopeni, 2021). However, in the 1980s, following student demonstrations in Kosova 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 Kosova's autonomous region status under the repressive Milosevic regime. Unemployment soared as Albanians were expelled from their jobs – 150,000 according to Gashi (2021) – including teachers and university professors. 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. Among the more educated migrants were professionals and students, who increased the proportion of skilled migrants within the Albanian diaspora. Also, amongst the migrants were many young men who wanted to escape conscription into the army of the former Yugoslavia (Dahinden, 2005; Haxhikadrija, 2009). It is estimated that around 350,000 Albanians emigrated from Kosova

during this period, and a portion of them did not return after the end of the war.

The third stage covers the years 1998-1999 and the war in Kosova, as a result of which more than 850,000 ethnic Albanians fled the country as refugees, mainly to Albania and to a lesser extent to the Albanian regions of North Macedonia and Montenegro (OECD, 2022). Some eventually made it as refugees to EU countries and the USA. At the end of the war, many returned voluntarily to Kosova (Gashi, 2021), but some remained in the host countries, creating opportunities for family reunification that occurred in the following decade.

The fourth stage begins around 2000 and continues to the present. This phase is characterised by a combination of intense emigration, return migration, internal migration, and a small amount of immigration – although emigration remains the dominant flow (Hajdari and Krasniqi, 2021). The migration drivers are mainly economic – high unemployment, low incomes and poverty (especially for lower-skilled migrants), and to have better career prospects and working conditions (especially for higher-skilled migrants). Despite recent economic progress in Kosova, unemployment still remains high at 10.8 per cent in 2024 (19.5 per cent among 15–24-year-olds), while the gap in average gross wages with Germany and Switzerland – the two main destination countries – was, respectively, seven and ten times higher in 2024 (ASK, 2025). As a result, a high incidence of poverty also becomes part of the mix of push factors: in 2017 – the most recent year for which data are available – 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 (ASK, 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 education and career purposes; on the other hand, the irregular migration of unskilled and less educated individuals. The latter type peaked in 2015, when 66,885 Kosovar citizens applied for first-time asylum in EU member states, mainly in Germany (Eurostat, 2016). 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).

Despite the various periods and layers of emigration, the Kosovar diaspora maintains very strong ties to its homeland and continues to have impacts on development. We see this in remittances, direct investments in the local economy, frequent visits to the homeland (bringing experience, skills, knowledge and new ideas), and, as we will see in the following sections, in the high willingness of the scientific diaspora to collaborate with universities and research institutions. Emigrants' remittances, growing rapidly, reached 1,355 million Euros in 2024, up from 980,1 million Euros in 2020 and representing 13.1 per cent of

Kosova's GDP (BQK, 2025). The World Bank (2024) ranks Kosova among the top 15 countries in the world for remittances as a percentage of GDP. Diaspora remittances have alleviated poverty for many families in Kosova, improved some of the key macroeconomic indicators, and have been partially invested in several sectors (construction, services, etc.), thereby contributing to economic growth.

In addition to the increase in size, the socio-demographic composition of the Kosovar diaspora has also undergone profound transformations across successive phases of migration. According to the 2011 Census, 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 (ASK, 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. The rapid socio-economic changes occurring in Kosova have been reflected in new migration flows and, as will be discussed below, in the evolving educational profile of the diaspora.

Given the above, the question arises as to the extent to which Kosova's large emigration flows contain an element of brain drain – a theme widely discussed in the literature on migration from Kosova. Already in the early 2000s, Hoti (2003) observed that although the phenomenon of brain drain in Kosova 'is still not strong, there are signs that as time passes it will become a concern.' But let us return to our argument. To partially answer this, we step aside from Kosovo for a moment and look at the better-documented case of Albania. In its 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 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 Kosova 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 Kosovars 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 Kosova 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 Kosovar population as a whole. On the other

hand, European Training Foundation data for 2020 show that the level of unemployment is lower amongst persons with higher education; thus, this group has a lower incentive to migrate.

Compared to other Western Balkan countries, Kosova shows evidence of net brain drain in its migration flows and ranks behind Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are characterised by brain gain. Leitner notes that brain drain in Kosova is most pronounced among individuals in their early to mid-20s, typically young people who have just completed their university studies and are seeking better employment prospects and higher wages abroad. These new trends in the educational profile of emigrants are also confirmed by World Bank (2024) findings based on the 'Life in Transition Survey' (2022–2023), which indicate that around 20 per cent of surveyed individuals reporting migration experience or intention have tertiary education.

If the above brief comparative analysis suggests that, unlike Albania, the Kosovar 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 Kosovar population is young by European standards: in 2024 its average age was 34.8 (ASK, 2024). Second, the education level of the population has been improving rapidly, especially post-independence (2008). As a comparison of the two Censuses shows, the share of the population aged 10 and over with tertiary education more than doubled – from 8.2 per cent in 2011 to 17.2 per cent in 2024. Note also the closing of the gender gap over the same period. In 2011, men's share was about 1.7 times women's; by 2024 gender parity had been attained on this metric (ASK, 2024).

Some destination-country data and policies reinforce this trend towards an incipient brain drain, especially insights from Germany, the largest host of the Kosovar 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 2023, the number of Kosovars employed in Germany's healthcare sector was equivalent to 50.3 per cent of Kosova's domestic healthcare workforce (Ruer and Vujanovic, 2025). According to the German Medical Association, the number of doctors from Kosova registered in Germany rose from 113 in 2013 to 554 in 2024. Other reports show that nearly all medical students in Kosova are learning German in order to facilitate their chances of migration (Ahmetxhekaj, 2019). Meanwhile, our recent study found that 46.5 per cent of doctors from Kosova – but 65.7 per cent among those aged 24–40 – intend to migrate, primarily to Germany and Switzerland (Gëdeshi et al., 2026).

Beyond healthcare personnel, Kosovar migrants also include tertiary-level students, IT specialists, engineers, and academics (World Bank, 2024). The OECD (2022) reports that at least 3,750 students from Kosova were

enrolled in higher education abroad in 2019, primarily in the United States, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. Likewise, the GAP institute (2024) indicates that 1,117 Kosovar IT professionals were employed in Germany in 2023. The status and mobility patterns of academics and researchers will be examined in greater detail in the subsequent sections of this study.

Hence, we ask not only about how large is the actual and likely brain drain in Kosova 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 Kosova?

Methodology

This study on the scientific diaspora from Kosova 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 has been completed by 492 respondents, of whom 72 per cent were holders of PhDs and 28 per cent were enrolled on PhD programmes abroad. The main difficulty in conducting the survey was obtaining valid email addresses for an '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, extending from 2018 to 2025. A first approach was made to Kosovar PhD researchers and graduates abroad whom we knew either from personal academic networks or from previous research projects (Gëdeshi and King, 2018; King and Gëdeshi, 2024); 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 Kosova's embassies and NGOs in European countries also helped with contacts, for example in Germany and Sweden.

After establishing an initial contact, potential respondents 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 Kosovar scientific diaspora and its potential for collaboration with partner scientific institutions in Kosova and Albania. Some of these written observations are included in this study, whilst preserving their anonymity.

The overall response rate was 63 per cent, which we deem satisfactory for an online survey of this kind. Only 1.9 per cent of diaspora members refused to participate, citing personal data concerns. A few emails were returned as undeliverable, and the rest did not respond. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether the requests sent out reached a representative cross-

section of the Kosovar 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 (492), and the broader information collected from the interviews, we have no reason to believe that the general picture which we present of the survey results is significantly distorted.

The survey was designed by the authors and 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 Kosova (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 Kosova (public or private sector, desired form of collaboration etc.).

The findings are presented 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 42 survey respondents was interviewed, mostly via Zoom; 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 Kosova. 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.

The Kosovar scientific diaspora: size and structure

Whilst there are estimates of the size of the overall Kosovar 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 Kosovar migrants in OECD countries had tertiary education (World Bank, 2016). This share has undoubtedly grown since then, reflecting the improvement in education standards of Kosovar youth. In 2015, a survey by UNDP reported in Gashi (2021) estimated that 10 per cent of individuals who had emigrated from Kosova in the previous six months had tertiary education, although there is no indication of the subshare with PhDs. Meanwhile, the recent World Bank publication (2024) estimated that around 20 per cent of surveyed individuals reporting migration experience or intention have tertiary education.

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 492 respondents and of this being a minority of the total 'out there', we suggest that at least 1,000 Kosovars with the requisite educational status are living, working or studying in other countries – nearly all, one assumes, in advanced OECD countries.

This pool of researchers is not insignificant, and represents around 25 per cent of Kosovars who have a PhD and an estimated more than 45 per cent of the academic potential of the country. This ever-growing reservoir of Albanian 'brains' may and ought to be mobilised for the benefit of the socio-economic development of the country, particularly if specific conditions are in place.

The size of the scientific diaspora from Kosova multiplies if we also include the Albanian scientific diaspora from Albania and North Macedonia. Based on data from other surveys which we have carried out, we estimate that there are at least 4,000 PhD-holders and PhD candidates from Albania and more than 100 from North Macedonia. In our studies we have shown that around 90 per cent of Albanian PhDs from Albania and North Macedonia who live, work or study in OECD countries are willing to cooperate not only with their own countries but also with Kosovar universities and research institutions (Gëdeshi and King, 2018; 2021).

There are three main wellsprings feeding the Albanian scientific diaspora from Kosova. First, there is the emigration of professionals (doctors, engineers, lecturers, academics, etc.) who have already completed their undergraduate and perhaps some postgraduate studies in Kosova, and then move to pursue doctoral studies in universities in developed OECD countries. Second, there are young men and women who, after completing secondary education, go abroad to study, starting from undergraduate programmes and continuing up to the doctoral level. Third, there are the highly educated children of Kosovar immigrants who settled in the host country some time ago and have completed or are currently pursuing a doctorate.

Our survey data shed informative light on the various 'routes' to membership of the Kosovar scientific diaspora. The largest part, corresponding to the first source mentioned above, are 58 per cent of those who, after completing their undergraduate and postgraduate studies, emigrate to continue their education/specialisation abroad and to pursue doctoral studies. Most of them (69 per cent) go abroad after some work experience in Kosova, while the rest emigrate immediately after completing their initial tertiary-level studies (bachelor, master). This group, in addition to completing their undergraduate studies in Kosova, has work experience mainly in public and private universities (40 per cent), scientific institutions (12 per cent), public administration (17 per cent) and the private sector (14 per cent). Consequently, the connections of this group with their homeland are multiple: including family, former classmates, colleagues from the institutions where they worked, and others within their home communities.

The second route is through bachelor study-abroad degrees. Around 17 per cent of the survey respondents, after completing their high-school education in Kosova, pursued higher education abroad at the bachelor, master's, and doctoral level. They completed their bachelor studies in 20 countries, mainly in Turkey, the United States, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and Greece, among others. Many within this group received scholarships from the host country or university, or from the government of Kosova. Their connections to their home country remain multiple and strong, including family ties, former school friends, and networks within their home communities.

The third group (around 24 per cent) consists of second-generation and 1.5-generation Kosovar-origin holders of PhDs and PhD students. A relatively small share of the overall sample – 9 per cent – are 'true' second-generation born and educated outside of Kosova, 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 Kosova, nearly three-quarters 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 Kosova 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.'

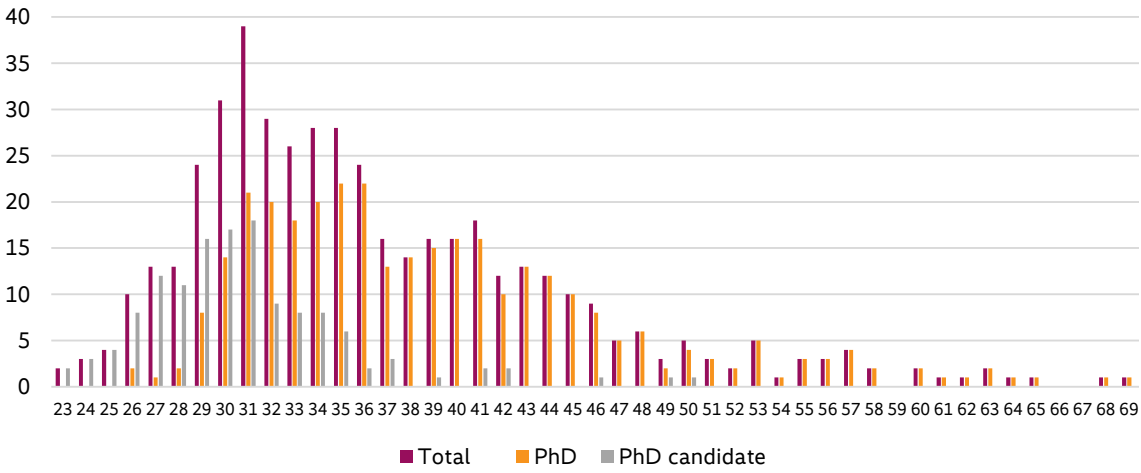
The remainder of the third group – 15 per cent of the total sample – is made up of individuals who were taken abroad as children when their parents emigrated. Depending on the age at which these children went abroad, they will have spent varying amounts of time in school in Kosova and then in the new host country. The survey responses show that, of this 1.5-generation subgroup, 34 per cent did not attend school in Kosova, 29 per cent went to school in Kosova for just a few years, and 37 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 Kosova.

Demographic characteristics

The online survey results point to the Kosovar scientific diasporas as a young, dynamic, highly qualified segment of the population. Nearly three-quarters are aged less than 40 (72.7 per cent), with an average age in 2025 for the total sample of 36.8 years (34.7 years for the female part and 38.5 years for the male; 39.2 years for the PhD-holders and 30.8 for the PhD candidates). Figure 1 sets out this age data in more detail.

Fig. 1

Figure 1. Scientific diaspora from Kosova by age (number))

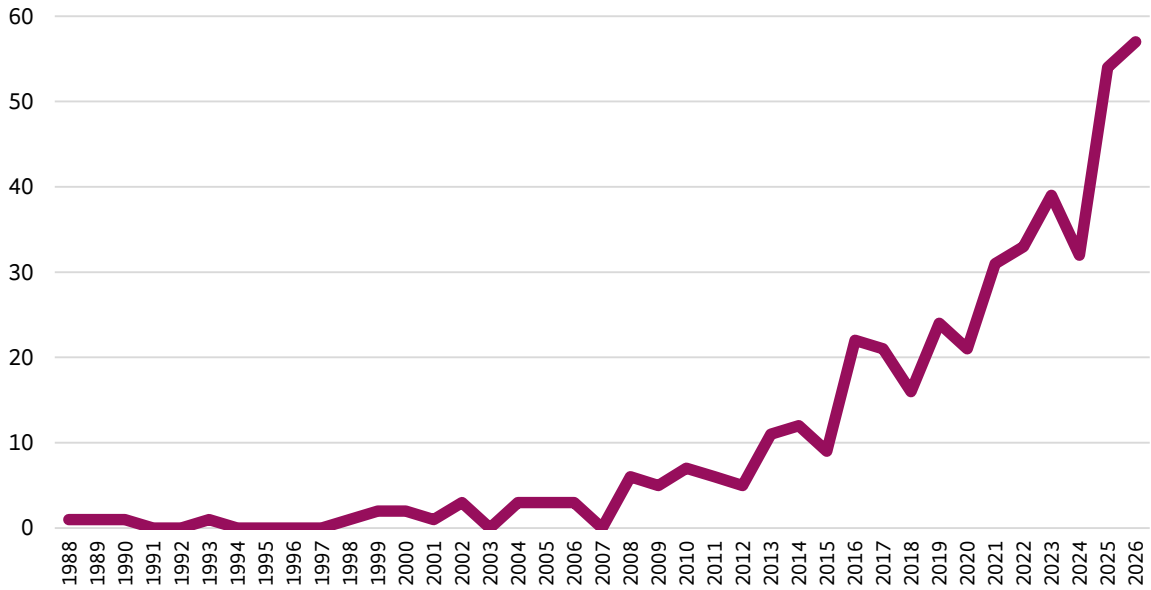


Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

Men are in a slight majority (55.3 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? We feel that the former is the more likely case, given that men were, as noted earlier, a majority in higher education in Kosova until relatively recently. Of the survey respondents, 48.3 per cent are married, 49.1 per cent are single and the remainder are either cohabiting/engaged (1.8 per cent) or divorced (1 per cent). Some respondents are married to non-Kosovar/Albanian spouses.

Figure 2. Percentage of doctorates by year of completion

Fig. 2



2. Percentage of doctorates by year of completion

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. Almost 96 per cent of the survey respondents finished or will finish their PhD in the period since 2008 (Figure 2). Virtually all the PhD-holders studied for their doctorates outside Kosova; 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 Kosovar PhD-holders and students did their Bachelor and Master's studies abroad (56.1 and 77 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.

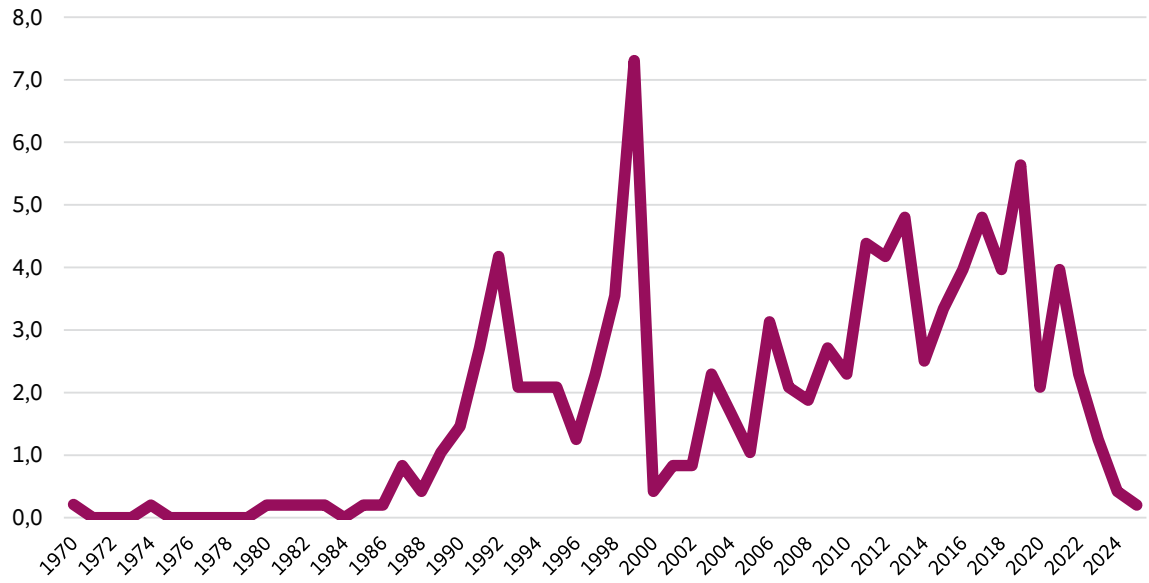
Motives for emigrating

The most frequently cited reason for emigrating, cited by 70.6 per cent of the survey respondents, is for study and research in a good foreign university. Others, especially those currently working in academic and scientific institutions abroad, nominated lack of infrastructure and facilities for research in their home country (16.7 per cent) and desire to acquire specialised professional training abroad (13 per cent). These three reasons, taken together, constitute a primary academic rationale for leaving Kosova to progress their studies and specialised scientific careers.

Another set of reasons, less frequently cited but nevertheless of some importance, comprise economic (18.8 per cent) and political reasons (18.5 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 were 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 Kosova 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 Kosova) 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 Kosova 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 Kosova.

Figure 3. First year of emigration for representatives of the scientific diaspora (in%)



Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

Figure 3 shows the year of first emigration for Kosovar-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 Kosova. 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, Kosova 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 Kosova very much to increase its human capital.'*

But Andra does not go on to reflect what is the impact on Kosova 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 Kosova in 2017 to pursue her university studies abroad, confirms:

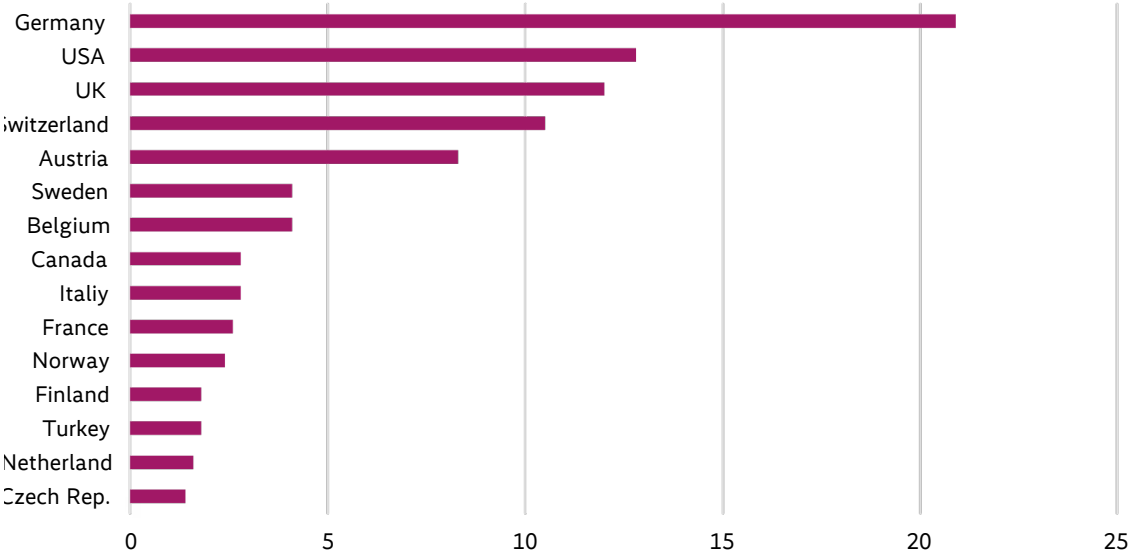
'The numbers of young people from Kosova studying abroad have been trending upwards. Most of them got scholarships from various EU countries. Kosova is a developing country, but its young people are bright, they speak English, they win scholarships to study abroad and they adapt easily.'

Destination countries and further mobility

While scattered across 32 countries around the globe, the Kosovar scientific diaspora, according to the online survey, is mainly concentrated in five countries – Germany (20.9 per cent), USA (12.8 per cent), UK (12 per cent), Switzerland (10.5 per cent) and Austria (8.3 per cent) – which together account for 64.5 per cent of the PhD-holders and PhD students abroad (see Figure 4). The countries fall into three groups. The first consists of the traditional countries for Kosovar emigrants dating from the 1960s – principally Germany, Switzerland and Austria, but also France, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries. They host around 54 per cent of the surveyed sample. A second group, hosting 27.6 per cent, comprises anglophone countries – USA, UK and 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).

Fig. 4

Figure 4. Geographic distribution of the scientific diaspora from Kosova (in %)



Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

The destination countries are selected according to two main criteria: 'the good name and reputation of the universities there' (31.5 per cent) and 'the possibility to work and study' (25.5 per cent). Other notable factors are 'knowing the language' (15.1 per cent), 'having a scholarship' (10.5 per cent) and 'having relatives/friends there' (9.5 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 scientific diaspora in Kosova. 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 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 1. First country of migration and current country of residence (%)

Country	First country of migration	Current country	Difference Kosova	Difference Albania
Austria	6,3	8,3	+ 2	-0,3
Belgium	3,0	4,1	+ 1.1	+ 0.7
Canada	0,6	2,8	+ 2.2	+ 4.2
France	4,1	2,6	- 1.5	+ 0.8
Germany	17,7	20,9	+ 3.2	+ 1.0
Greece	1,2	0,2	- 1	- 7.9
Hungary	2,6	1,2	- 1.4	n. a
Italy	3,0	2,8	- 0.2	- 10.9
Switzerland	8,3	10,5	+ 2.2	+ 1.4
Turkey	5,1	1,8	- 3.3	- 3.3
UK	9,8	12,0	+ 2.2	+ 2.4
USA	13,4	12,8	- 0.6	+ 10.1
former Yugoslavia	4,6	1,2	- 3.4	n. a

Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova; Gëdeshi and King, 2018.

Table 1 shows that, in this way, Turkey is a net 'loser' from this general pattern of onward migration, as are a few other countries (Greece, Hungary, Italy, former Yugoslavia). The 'gainers' are the countries listed above (Austria, Belgium, Canada, 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 1).

Fields of study and employment

Table 2 shows that the Kosovar scientific diaspora has studied (or are studying) across many academic and professional fields. The three top fields are natural sciences, social sciences and informatics, together comprising more than 62 per cent of all respondents to the survey. Table 2 also shows the comparison with Albania, in which the three fields nominated above are less important (46.9 per cent). This difference may be interpreted in two ways. The first is that the scientific diaspora from Kosova 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 Kosovar 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 2 indicates that Albania's scientific diaspora is more evenly spread in terms of study fields than Kosova's, with a greater

focus on economics and business studies.

Table 2. Fields of study for the PhDs from Kosova and Albania (%)

Fields of study	Kosova	Albania	Difference
Social sciences (politics, sociology etc.)	17,3	15,4	+ 1.9
Natural sciences (biology, physics, maths)	28,1	21,0	+ 7.1
Economics and business studies	9,7	17,4	- 7.7
Medical subject	11,5	15,4	- 3.9
Engineering and construction	10,6	13,4	- 2.8
Computing, informatics, electronics	17,0	10,5	+ 6.5
Other (law, architecture, languages etc.)	5,8	6,9	- 1.1

Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova; Author's survey for Albanian scientific diaspora from Albania (Gëdeshi and King, 2018, 2021).

Some of the above aspects relating to Kosova'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 Kosova 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 Kosova go to German-speaking countries. I know many Albanians from Kosova 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 Kosova 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 (76.9 per cent) works in the academic sector in universities, research institutes and scientific laboratories. The remainder are employed in private companies (12.5 per cent), non-scientific public institutions (7 per cent), NGOs (2.5 per cent), work as self-employed and freelance professionals (0.8 per cent) or 'other' (0.3 per cent). In universities, research institutes and scientific laboratories, they work as lecturers, scientific researchers, post-docs, assistants or PhD students. More than 10 per cent of them work as lecturers in the universities of USA, UK, Sweden, Austria, Turkey, Switzerland,

etc. According to data from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), ten lecturers from Kosovo are currently employed at universities across the United Kingdom.

One of the most interesting findings from the survey is that the vast majority – 96.5 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' or 'deskilling'.

Homeland ties

The scientific diaspora from Kosova, especially those who emigrated when they were adults, maintains strong material and spiritual connections with the home country. From the online survey, 92 per cent have regular contacts with Kosova through various means of communication – telephone, email, WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, 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, Zoom or WhatsApp. I also communicate, every now and again, with my friends through the same means. Once a year, I go to Kosova 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, 28 per cent of the respondents visit Kosova once a year, like Gramoz; in addition, another 56 per cent visit more than once a year, typically 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 Kosova continue to visit their home country irrespective of the number of years they have been abroad... They are well aware that, with 3,000-4,000 euros, they could have luxurious holidays with their families elsewhere, but they prefer to spend their money in Kosova, for the sake of the country and 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 Kosova 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 Kosova. In July and August, all of the Albanian diaspora returns to Kosova. People meet each other and create a kind of micro-society in the summer months'*

Meanwhile, a smaller share (12 per cent) visits Kosova 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 Kosova 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.'*

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 Kosova very often'.

The close family connections and frequent transnational contacts explain the significant and rising level of remittances sent to Kosova. According to the World Bank (2024), based on the Life in Transition Survey, 2022–2023, around 80 per cent of Kosovar migrants reported sending remittances at least once. Such remittances, usually sent direct to family members (parents, siblings etc.), are an important source of support for them. In 2022, almost two-thirds of families in Kosova benefited from remittances, a share significantly higher than in any other Western Balkan country (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022). Doruntina, in Switzerland, says:

> *'In Kosova, 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 Kosova, 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 Kosova and Albania. Albanian-language TV channels are another important source of information, as well as some newspapers and portals such as Bota Sot, Koha.net, Telegrafi, Zëri.info, Gazeta Express, etc. Table 3 shows the forms of information of the scientific diaspora, where the main source is internet sites.

Table 3. Information forms of the scientific diaspora from Kosova (in %)

No	Forms of information	Percent
1	Telephone conversations with family members, relatives, friends	68,6
2	Through visits to the homeland	45,7
3	Through Albanian channels and TV	22,9
4	Through the Internet	84,6
5	Other	0,9
6	They are not informed	2,4

Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

Information about developments in Kosova and Albania is also shared when members of the diaspora meet up and socialise with each other abroad.

'Home', 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 Kosova. 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 Kosova'. 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 Kosova.'

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

This strong sense of Albanian identity and belonging – which, as we will show in the following sections, is manifested in the high willingness to contribute expertise to Kosova and Albania – must be preserved and further strengthened. Several initiatives undertaken in Kosova work in this direction. One example is the initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs and Diaspora, which, through the Citizen Diplomacy Fellowship program, invites young professionals from the diaspora to contribute to improving Kosova's global standing. Another example is OriginAl, a program of the organisation GERMIN, which offers an educational and cultural tour for young adults of the Albanian diaspora to their countries of origin. The program includes volunteer activities and aims to motivate participants to discover and connect with their roots. Ultimately, OriginAl seeks to reshape how younger diaspora generations perceive their countries of origin.

Social capital

In their various host-country settings, members of the 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' (37.6 per cent) or 'frequent' (29.5 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 19 per cent answered 'Yes'; primarily these were organisations and networks of the following type – student (44 per cent), cultural (39 per cent), scientific (30 per cent) and political (10 per cent).[9] Some of the associations referred to by the respondents are:

→ Alb-Shkenca (Albanian Science), https://alb-shkenca.org

- → Vlera (Belgium), https://www.vlera.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;
- → American Albanian Medical Society.

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, Ndriçim, 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.'*

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 Kosova, linking the country to international experts and networks in various sectors..

New role of Kosova's embassies

Kosova's embassies and diplomatic representatives in host countries can also play an instrumental role in fostering connections among the scientific diaspora and strengthening its ties with the homeland. This can be achieved through a range of targeted activities and initiatives.

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 Kosova, as well as have the opportunity to meet one another. These contacts and meetings can also take simpler forms, such as occasional online conversations, working visits to the cities where Albanian academics and researchers live, or visits to the universities, research institutions or laboratories where they work.

It is important that in these meetings the Albanian scientific diaspora is treated as a single, unified community, rather than divided according to countries of origin. Dritani, an ambassador at one of Kosova's diplomatic missions in an EU member state, explains:

> *'The Albanian scientific diaspora from Albania, Kosova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheva is a community that coexists and operates together. In the activities we organise – and likewise the Embassy of Albania – we do not draw distinctions within the Albanian scientific diaspora.'*

Many countries around the world have established associations and networks to connect their scientific diasporas with their homelands. These structures help promote professional integration, research collaboration and brain circulation. They also serve as bridges between institutions in the country of origin and those in the host country. In addition to individual networks, some countries have created 'networks of networks,' such as EURAXESS in the European Union, RAICEX in Spain, and RINA/ASCINA in Austria, which coordinate activities and enhance overall effectiveness (Warner et al., 2022). Drawing on these international experiences, Kosova's embassies can encourage the establishment of scientific diaspora networks and associations in the countries where they operate, as well as contribute to strengthening their capacities. In countries where the scientific diaspora is particularly concentrated, embassies should also promote the creation of an umbrella association that brings together different sector-specific groups – such as associations of academics, medical professionals, engineers, students, and others. As an example of a positive initiative, here is an extract from the interview with one Kosova Ambassador in December 2021:

> *'I initiated the setting up of a network of the [Albanian] 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 Kosova 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 Kosova. 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 Kosova in other countries which host an Albanian scientific diaspora.'

When such networks and associations exist, diplomatic representatives may act as mediators between the scientific diaspora and universities or research institutions in Kosova. The ambassador quoted above continues:

'This activity [the creation of the diaspora network] was followed by a series of useful initiatives, as several universities in Sweden established links with universities in Kosova. Two years ago, an IT school was opened in Kosova for the first time, as part of a collaboration with a Swedish university and funded by the EU. It was a joint venture between two public universities and one private university in Kosova, which together launched the doctoral school in technology in Kosova.'

Cooperation with the scientific diaspora requires, first and foremost, a new mindset and genuine willingness from the diplomatic corps, as well as the financial and human resources necessary to engage with it. It also requires the creation of an up-to-date database of the Albanian scientific diaspora (from Albania, Kosova, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Presheva) in order to map and understand the available human capital. An ambassador interviewed in one of the EU member states explains:

'Each embassy should have a database indicating where our Albanian academics and researchers are located and in what ways we can collaborate with them. This also contributes to the country's

positive image. For example, a successful and highly regarded university professor will inevitably be identified as someone from Kosova. And this is something very beneficial for the country.'

In the main countries where the Albanian scientific diaspora is concentrated, the respective embassies should designate a diplomat who, alongside their other duties, would also serve as a Science Attaché. This diplomat should maintain regular contact with the scientific diaspora on the one hand, and with universities and research institutions in Kosova on the other. They should also convey the ideas and perspectives of the scientific diaspora regarding various aspects of Kosova's economic, social and political development. The results of their work could be assessed based on the number of scientific diaspora members engaged and the number of projects implemented in cooperation with universities or scientific institutions in Kosova.

The scientific diaspora is also a powerful instrument for promoting national interests, and its most distinguished members serve as ambassadors of Kosova and Albania – much like renowned Albanian singers, artists, and sportsmen and women across the world. The achievements and contributions of this scientific diaspora should be made widely known through mass media in Kosova, both as a source of national pride and as an inspiring example for the younger generation.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, together with Kosova's embassies, should increase funding to support the activities of scientific diaspora associations and networks. They should also organise workshops or training sessions for diplomatic staff, where positive examples and best practices in engaging with the scientific diaspora can be presented and discussed.

Mobilising the scientific diaspora

In the 1970s, Bhagwati – one of the most prominent critics of the brain drain phenomenon – argued that wealthy countries should be taxed in order to compensate countries of origin for the losses caused by brain drain (Bhagwati and Martin, 1976). This concept has since evolved to the point that Bhagwati himself wrote in 1994 that developing countries should benefit from the skills and talents of their citizens abroad (Bhagwati and Rao, 1994). Today, brain drain is no longer viewed solely as a loss; instead, attention is increasingly placed on the potential of highly qualified emigrants to contribute to their countries of origin. In short, the approach in use now is that of diasporas, which – when certain conditions are met – can be mobilised for the benefit of their homeland.

Many countries around the world have been paying close attention to their respective scientific diasporas, which they seek to mobilise and organise for the benefit of the home country (Kuznetsov, 2006; Tejada, 2012). Similarly, in Latin America – to mention only a few cases – Colombia has created the Caldas Network (1991), Argentina has launched the RAICES program (2008), Guatemala has established the Converciencia program (2005), and Brazil has introduced the Innovation Diplomacy program (2017). In Asia, India and China – the countries with the largest scientific diasporas in the world – have developed networks, programs and initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration and facilitating the return or engagement of their global talent.

When the post-socialist transition began, Hungary made attempts to activate a network of emigrant scientists, estimated at about 12 per cent of its global scientific potential (Portnoff, 1996). In the early 2000s, a group of Romanian scientists established the Ad-Astra network to support the revival of the research sector in Romania (Nedelcu, 2008). Ukraine, too – despite being at war – has shown strong interest and has undertaken initiatives aimed at engaging its scientific diaspora, which could play a crucial role in the country's post-war reconstruction and development (Polishchuk et al., 2023).

The question that arises in this context is: can Kosova also mobilise its scientific diaspora? The answer is straightforward: certainly yes. Moreover, Kosova possesses several advantages that other countries do not have. But before elaborating on these, let us examine two additional experiences – one from Albania and the other from Kosova.

In 2021, the Albanian American Development Fund (AADF) launched the READ program (Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora), through which members of the Albanian scientific diaspora can contribute to the development of higher education institutions in Albania and to the broader advancement of scientific research in the country. Over a seven-year period, the program will bring 100 researchers of Albanian heritage living in OECD countries to collaborate with higher

education institutions in Albania on joint research projects and capacity-building activities, including PhD supervision, curriculum co-development, and co-teaching, for periods ranging from one to six months.[11] Meanwhile in Kosova, GERMIN, through its Engaging Diaspora Professionals program, supports the transfer and exchange of knowledge and skills from the diaspora to institutions, organisations and private entities in the home countries. To date, GERMIN has engaged over 100 professionals from various fields, while more than 500 diaspora professionals have registered. One of the program's projects is Diaspora4Innovation, which aims to engage professionals and academics from the Albanian diaspora to contribute to the development of higher education in Albania. The project seeks to build long-term partnerships between higher education institutions in Albania and diaspora experts abroad.[10]

There are two main ways in which the scientific diaspora can contribute to the socio-economic and intellectual development of Kosova. 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 Kosova more dynamic. However, for return to take place, certain conditions have to be met and obstacles overcome, which are further considered in a later section of this paper. The second means for the diaspora to contribute to the scientific development of Kosova 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 Kosova, 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 Kosova 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 Kosova. Around 32.8 per cent answered 'Yes', 22.8 per cent said 'No' and the majority, 44.5 per cent, responded 'I haven't decided yet'; these being the three options on the questionnaire. Interestingly, the desire to return to Kosova is twice as high as the desire expressed by the scientific diaspora from Albania, 17.1 per cent (Gëdeshi and King, 2018, 2021), indicating a greater 'loyalty' on the part of the Kosovar scientific diaspora, even if the overall figure, representing 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 90.3 per cent), scientific institutions (74.0 per cent), international organisations (55.1 per cent), and private universities (53.3 per cent) were the four main employment targets; followed by smaller shares checking NGOs/think-tanks (33.9 per cent), private companies (27.3 per cent), public administration (17.6 per cent) and freelancing (15.4 per cent).

A further question probed the reasons why respondents want or intend to return to Kosova. 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 that 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 48.0 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 (28.4 per cent), and the second was family pressures to return (27.7 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 Kosova and Albania. I want to share my knowledge and I know that there are very good students [to teach] in Kosova 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 Kosova, 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 Kosova. We were 13 students from Kosova 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 Kosova 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 Kosova. I am currently researching my PhD and my wish is to return to Kosova. I do not know when exactly... Kosova 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 Kosova, I see an obligation toward Kosova 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 Kosova, what I can do to contribute to Kosova, 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 Kosova but also Albania that is mentioned as a place to return to.

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

'In Kosova, 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.'

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. Here is a long extract from the interview with PhD-holder Qëndresa, who lives in Switzerland.

'Some of the Albanian [Kosovar] youth, after the victory of the new government, would like to return to Kosova. As a family, i.e. my husband and I, although we both have our jobs in Switzerland, after the election victory, 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 do not see how Kosova will have the capacity to advance at an adequate pace within a short period of time... If I return to Kosova 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 the new government to a certain extent... They are 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 (2.8 per cent); 6.1 per cent answer that they will return within one year, 15.4 per cent within 2-3 years, and 16.8 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 (21.5 per cent), or after 10 years (3.3 per cent), but 34.1 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 Kosova 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 Kosova. 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 Kosova. I like Geneva very much and I think it offers many opportunities for professional development. If I were to return immediately to Kosova, 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 Kosova; 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 Kosova 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 Kosova, to the University of Prishtina, first of all because there is a shortage of academic staff... Albania would also be an option...'

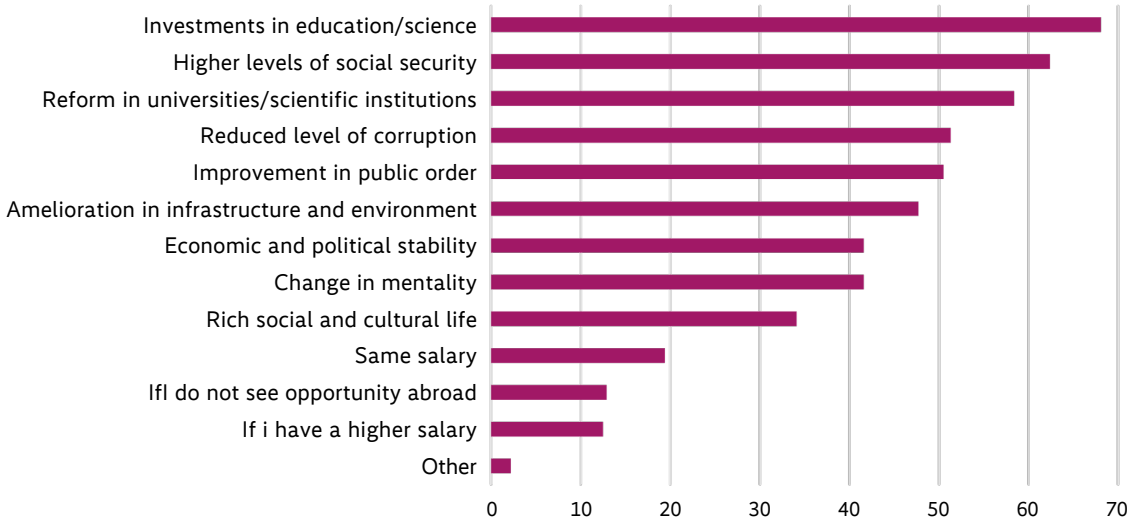
For certain professions, the duration of stay before return may be even longer. For example, Flaka has started her PhD in medicine in a well-known medical school at a university in Central Europe. She says:

'I do not plan to return to Kosova 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 Kosova'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 Kosova. 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)..

Figure 5. Pre-conditions for the return of the scientific diaspora



Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

Survey respondents who had not yet decided whether to return were asked about the pre-conditions that would need to be met in Kosova 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 5. Five factors scored over 50 per cent: increased investments in education and science (68.1 per cent), higher levels of social security (62.4 per cent), reform of the universities and scientific institutions (58.4 per cent), reduced levels of corruption (51.3 per cent), and improvement in public order (50.5 per cent). Other pre-conditions, less important but mostly still significant to note, are listed in Figure 5. 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.'*

Cooperation at a distance

Given the headline results presented earlier that only about one-third of the Kosovar scientific diaspora do intend to return, that one-fifth intend not to return, and that 44.5 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 Kosova 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 Kosova?' Less than a quarter (21.7 per cent) replied 'Yes', 75.6 per cent replied 'No', with a residual 2.7 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 through my personal connections in Kosova 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 Kosova. In previous years, I have had similar visiting experiences. Also, together with researchers from Kosovar universities, we published a book in 2019 on development in Kosova.'*

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

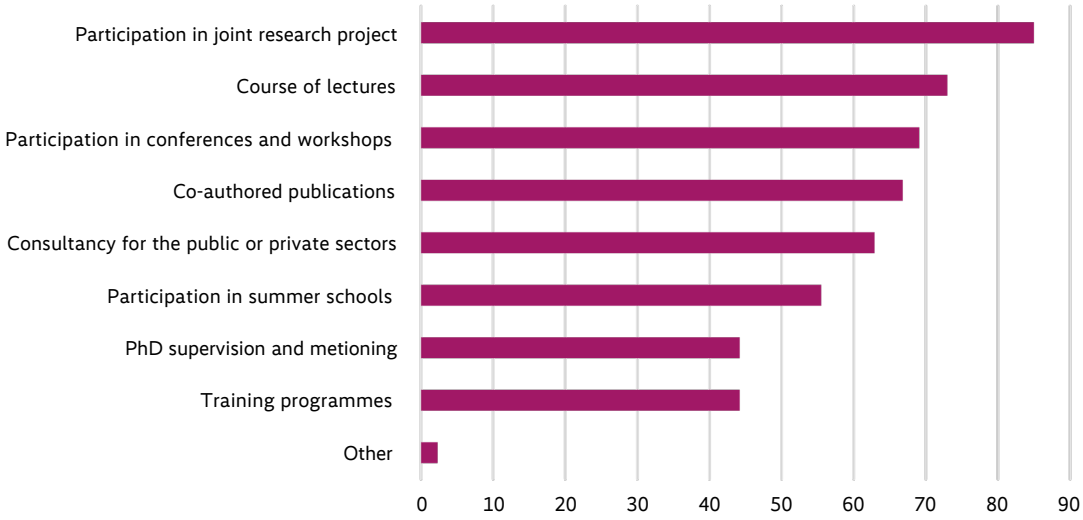
> *'I must be honest: connections with universities in Kosova are established only by my personal initiative. For the moment, there is a project I started and wrote, and we receive support from the EU. Two universities in Kosova and two in Albania are benefiting from this project. But I have never been contacted by any Kosovar institutions... I visit Kosova regularly, but I have never been invited to speak in front of students... Whatever happens in Kosova [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 Kosovar diaspora, even if it has mainly been via their own personal initiatives. According to our study, 90.6 per cent express a desire to cooperate with universities and scientific institutions in Kosova, only 2.5 per cent say they do not wish to cooperate and the remainder did not answer the question. Many see such cooperation as an obligation which they are keen to fulfil. In the words of Marigo, who lives in an EU country:

> *'I have lots of energy and a great desire to contribute to Kosova. 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 Kosova.'*

Figure 6. Desired forms of cooperation with universities and scientific institutions



Source: Authors' survey on scientific diaspora from Kosova

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 Figure 6. Respondents could check more than one activity. Top of the list of desired types of cooperation are those mentioned already: joint research 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 Kosova for a few days every month to contribute to one of the clinics there.'

In addition to their willingness to cooperate with Kosova, 88.4 per cent are also ready to collaborate with universities and scientific institutions in Albania and North Macedonia.

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 (Taferra, 2005). Our Kosovar 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 Kosova, 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 Kosova. 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 [Kosovar 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 Kosovar 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 Kosova 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 Kosova... 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 Kosova... 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 Kosovar 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 Kosova 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 Kosova 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 Kosova, 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 (Kaçaniku 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 Kosova should be accelerated. First, the contribution of the diaspora will quicken the pace of social, economic and political development in Kosova. Without the injection of expertise from abroad, intellectual and scientific development runs the risk of stagnating in Kosova. 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 Kosova 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 Kosova's development.'*

Second, there is the need to respect the feelings of obligation to help Kosova 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 Kosova. 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 Kosova 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 scientific diaspora from Kosova 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 Kosovar 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 Kosovar-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 Kosova's development.

The scientific diaspora is, on the one hand, a product of Kosova's freedom and independence, as it was only after the 2000s that so many young people were able to pursue studies in the most developed countries of the EU and North America. On the other hand, it is also partly the result of the migration waves of the earlier decades, when many Albanians emigrated to Western countries out of necessity – escaping ethnic violence and poverty – but succeeded in raising a new, educated generation.

This scientific diaspora is expected to continue expanding rapidly in the future for at least two reasons. First, the educational level of the population in Kosova has been rising: within a relatively short period – between the two consecutive censuses of 2011 and 2023 – the share of the population with tertiary education has more than doubled, and gender balance in higher education has been achieved. Second, the diaspora from Kosova now numbers over one million members, and the younger generation is studying at universities in the most developed countries of Europe and North America. Consequently, this diaspora will produce an increasing number of engineers, physicians, computer scientists, economists, and other highly skilled professionals, some of whom will go on to pursue advanced academic and research careers.

This brings us back to an issue raised earlier: what advantages does the scientific diaspora from Kosova possess compared to that of other countries? Beyond the descriptive quantitative data derived from the

online survey, two discursive themes stood out prominently in the interview material. The first was a patriotic willingness – even a perceived moral obligation – to return and/or to cooperate from a distance. The second was a sense of optimism and hope for Kosova's future, contingent on certain changes that would help restore a better atmosphere of social justice and transparent governance in the homeland.

In short, the scientific diaspora is a treasure for Kosova – both in terms of its human capital and its strong willingness to contribute to the country's socio-economic development.

But the willingness of the scientific diaspora to contribute to Kosova is only one side of the issue. The other side is the creation of appropriate conditions for return and cooperation. Consequently, the next question is: what should the government and institutions of Kosova do? Part of the answer is provided directly by the participants in the online survey and interviews, which we have merely summarised, structured, and ranked according to their importance.

First, the scientific diaspora calls for a thorough reform of the university system: increased investment in education and science, a less bureaucratic and rigid structure, and a merit-based system of hiring that supports career development in a transparent manner. Second, it calls for a reduction of corruption, greater security, improved infrastructure and environment, a change in societal mentality, and a richer cultural life – all within the framework of greater economic and political stability. And finally, an increase in salaries.

It is clear that such profound changes – even when there is political will – require both financial resources and time. Consequently, cooperation, together with the reforms outlined above, represents the fastest pathway for engaging the scientific diaspora. At the same time, meaningful cooperation also creates the conditions for eventual return.

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 Kosova, which should be integrated with similar records of Albanian-speaking PhDs from Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Presheva. 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.

Secondly, securing additional financial resources from the government and from international foundations operating in Kosova would undoubtedly facilitate this cooperation. The example of Albania – where a foundation (AADF) funds fellowships or short-term visits for academics and researchers from the scientific diaspora – illustrates one possible pathway. However, we believe that cooperation should ultimately become an internal movement in which every institution independently undertakes initiatives. Given today's technological possibilities, several forms of collaboration – such as online lectures, consultancy, co-authored publications, PhD supervision, participation in joint projects, and others – are easily achievable and low-cost. In this respect, increasing digitalisation within Kosova's universities and scientific institutions is essential and directly supports such cooperation.

Third, public and private universities in Kosova should establish dedicated offices for relations with the scientific diaspora. These offices should actively initiate contact and collaborate with members of the scientific diaspora. The short-term results of their work can be measured through several indicators, such as the number of guest lecturers invited from the diaspora, the number of EU projects won, the number of jointly supervised PhD candidates, the number of co-authored publications in international journals, and the number of agreements signed with the universities or scientific institutions where diaspora members work, among others. In the medium and long term, these efforts can be evaluated by the university's progress in global rankings. Similar offices or departments should also be established within the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora.

Fourth, the government of Kosova, 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. Universities and scientific institutions can include distinguished members of the scientific diaspora on academic boards and scientific councils, offer honorary titles, and promote their achievements in the mass media, among other measures. 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.

Fifth, cooperation with the scientific diaspora should be supported by Kosova's embassies, especially in countries where there are many Kosovar 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.

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1 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 Kosova to Turkey under the repressive policies of Rankovic. Other au-thors 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 1953-1960; and Blumi (2003) uncovers many ethnic Albanians from Kosova and North Macedonia mis-identified as 'Yugoslavs' or 'Turks' in the early postwar emigrations to Europe and elsewhere.

2 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).

3 According to the 2024 Census, Kosovo has 4,144 people with a doctorate (for more, see ASK, 2024).

4 According to ASK, the number of educational employees at the academic level in Kosova is 1,315, while the total number of academic employees is 945.

5 Respondents were allowed to nominate more than one reason, hence these percentage fig-ures, along with others quoted in the next paragraph, sum to more than 100. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/table-12

6 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/table-12

7 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'.

8 https://germin.org/youth-education

9 These figures refer to the shares of the 19 per cent who answered 'Yes' to this survey question; naturally, some respondents could check more than one type of association.

10 Alb-Shkenca, mentioned by many participants, is arguably the oldest and the largest Albani-an 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, Kosova, North Macedonia and Montenegro. Within the pages of their bulletin, Buletini Alb-Shkenca, and online, the association's 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 Alba-nia, Kosova etc.

11 https://www.iie.org/programs/research-expertise-from-the-academic-diaspora/about-read

12 https://germin.org/engaging-diaspora-professionals

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