

Authors:

This report has been drafted based on NGO Aktiv's and Empirika platform members' continuous data collection and analysis, as well as specific research conducted for this purpose. Substantial contributions have also been made by independent experts, Senad Šabović and Erdem Bute, both minority rights experts based in Kosovo.

Design: Nina baldini

Donor: The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

Published by: NGO AKTIV

Address: Kralja Petra 183a, North Mitrovica

Email: info@ngoaktiv.org
Website: www.ngoaktiv.org

Kosovo, March 2025

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Executive Summary

The AKTIV Community Rights Report provides an annual overview of the situation of non-majority communities in Kosovo, analyzing their access to rights, political representation, security, and socioeconomic conditions. This report is based on data collected through monitoring, desk research, focus group discussions, and interviews with community representatives.

The 2025 edition highlights challenges facing non-majority communities, particularly in terms of economic instability, legal access, institutional representation, and security concerns. It also outlines key developments from the past year and offers policy recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges. The reporting period for this report is largely since the beginning of 2024.

The report includes an analysis of the legal and institutional mechanisms available to non-majority communities in Kosovo, including their political representation at the central and local levels, their access to justice, and mechanisms for community participation. While these structures exist in principle, their effectiveness varies in practice, with many communities struggling to fully exercise their rights due to institutional barriers, political dynamics, and enforcement gaps.

Some of the major concerns are related to north Kosovo Serbs. The resignation of Serb police officers and judicial staff from Kosovo institutions in 2022 created a security and legal vacuum in northern Kosovo. Although new police recruits, including Serb officers, have been deployed, the situation remains tense, and trust in law enforcement is low. The presence of Kosovo Special Police Units, composed entirely of ethnic Albanians, has contributed to perceptions among Kosovo Serbs of ethnic-driven policing. Furthermore, social media analysis revealed thousands of posts where members of the Kosovo Police promoted ethnonationalist narratives, raising concerns about impartiality².

- According to the 2022 Security Barometer by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, trust in the Kosovo Police varies significantly between different ethnic communities. While 77% of Kosovar Albanians express trust or complete trust in the Kosovo Police, only 14.2% of Kosovo Serbs share a similar level of confidence. A majority of Kosovo Serbs, approximately 60%, indicate little or no trust at all. See at: https://westernbalkanscenter.org/ article/from-crisis-managementto-stability-and-integrationnavigating-kosovos-securitylandscape?utm_source=chatqpt. com
- ² Civil society organizations published a report titled "Ethnization of Kosovo Police: Erosion of Ahtisaari's Basis of a Civic and Multiethnic Institution": https://ngoaktiv.org/en/news/ethnization-of-kosovo-police-erosion-of-ahtisaaris-basis-of-a-civic-and-multiethnic-institution/

Economic and financial issues have further heightened tensions, particularly following the abolition of the Serbian dinar in Kosovo. This decision has disrupted financial transactions primarily for Serbs, but also other communities that rely on payments from Serbia. Many local businesses in Serb-majority areas have been negatively impacted as residents travel to Serbia for financial transactions and shopping. The closure of Serbia-run institutions, such as postal and social welfare offices, has further complicated daily life for affected communities 3. Access to public services remains a challenge, with language barriers continuing to hinder interaction with Kosovo institutions. Communities report difficulties in obtaining services in their native language, limiting their ability to engage with institutions effectively. While some local courts and administrative offices provide services in Serbian, this is inconsistent across different levels of government 4.

The report features recommendations aimed at improving the status of non-majority communities in Kosovo. These recommendations focus on enhancing political and institutional representation, ensuring security and law enforcement impartiality, addressing economic challenges, improving access to public services, and fostering better interethnic relations.

³ US and EU officials express concern about Pristina forcing ethnic Serb minority to use the euro:https://www.theguardian.com/ world/2024/feb/o6/kosovo-accusedof-raising-ethnic-tensions-bybanning-use-of-serbian-dinar

⁴ Civil organizations and media outlets launching a campaign for language rights: https://ngoaktiv.org/en/news/ launching-a-campaign-forlanguage-rights/

Legal and Institutional Mechanisms for Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo

Central Level

- ⁵ For more on the institutional mechanisms and analysis of their effectiveness, see "Comparative Analysis: Minority Rights and Participation, Views from Kosovo, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Hungary," by AKTIV and Visegrad Fund, at: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/comparative-analysis-EN.pdf
- ⁶ See the Constitution of Kosovo at: https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wpcontent/uploads/2017/10/1. CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_ REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf
- ⁷ See the Constitution of Kosovo at: https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wpcontent/uploads/2017/10/1. CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_ REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf

In the Assembly of Kosovo, a proportional representation system ensures that non-majority communities have reserved seats, twenty (20) of the one hundred twenty (120) seats. These reserved seats guarantee representation for parties, coalitions, civic initiatives, and independent candidates representing the Kosovo Serb community and other specified minority communities, based on their electoral performance. Parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives and independent candidates having declared themselves representing the other Communities shall have the total number of seats won through the open election, with a minimum number of seats in the Assembly guaranteed as follows: the Roma community, one (1) seat; the Ashkali community, one (1) seat; the Egyptian community, one (1) seat; and one (1) additional seat will be awarded to either the Roma, the Ashkali or the Egyptian community with the highest overall votes; the Bosnian community, three (3) seats; the Turkish community, two (2) seats; and the Gorani community, one (1) seat if the number of seats won by each community is less than the number guaranteed 6.

The Assembly, with a two-thirds majority vote, has the authority to amend the Constitution, including the reserved seats for minority community representatives. Importantly, Two (2) Deputy Presidents representing non-majority communities in the Assembly and are elected by a majority vote of all deputies of the Assembly. One (1) Deputy President shall belong to the deputies of the parliament holding seats reserved or guaranteed for the Serb community, and one (1) Deputy shall belong to deputies of the Assembly holding seats reserved or guaranteed for other communities that are not in the majority. 7

Another important mechanism on the central level is the Committee on Rights and Interests of Communities, a permanent assembly committee, which is normally comprised of representatives from the Serbian Community (although there are no Serb community representatives at this time), other non-majority communities, and the majority community. Proposed laws can be directed to this committee upon request by any member of the Assembly's Presidency. The committee has the authority to submit suggestions to other relevant committees or the Assembly to ensure proper consideration of community rights. Additionally, the committee can autonomously propose laws and measures within its jurisdiction, accompanied by individual member opinions. Matters can also be referred to the committee for advisory opinions by the Assembly Presidency, other committees, or a group of at least ten deputies.

The Kosovo Constitution stipulates mandatory approval of nonmajority communities for the adoption, amendment, or repeal of laws of vital interest. These laws cover various significant areas, including municipal boundaries, establishment or abolition of municipalities, powers of municipalities, inter-municipal and cross-border relations, implementation of community rights (excluding constitutional rights), language use, local elections, protection of cultural heritage, religious freedom, agreements with religious communities, education, and the use of symbols, including those related to communities and public holidays. The requirement ensures the inclusion of representatives from non-majority communities in decision-making on this matter. In essence, the constitutional provisions aim to empower nonmajority communities in Kosovo by preserving their cultural identity, ensuring educational rights, facilitating communication, and guaranteeing representation at various levels of governance.

The Government must have at least one Minister from the Kosovo Serb Community and one Minister from another non-majority community, with a provision for additional representation if there are more than twelve Ministers. Similarly, there should be at least two Deputy Ministers from the Kosovo Serb Community and two from other non-majority communities, with the possibility of additional representation if the number of ministers exceeds twelve. The selection of these officials involves consultations with parties, coalitions, or groups representing non-majority communities. Noteworthy is that the ministers and deputy ministers do not necessarily have to come from the ranks of political entities represented in the Assembly, but they do have to enjoy their formal endorsement. 8

⁸ The contents of this paragraph are outlined in the Constitution of Kosovo, see at:

https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1.
CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_
REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf

Another important mechanism for non-majority participation in decision-making is the Office for Community Affairs (OCA), established in 2008 under the Prime Minister of Kosovo, serving as an advisory body. Its functions include advising the Prime Minister on community-related issues, drawing attention to matters requiring personal intervention, coordinating with government bodies and international organizations, monitoring effective implementation of duties and policies, and developing communication channels with communities. Led by a political advisor appointed by the Prime Minister, the office aims to ensure equality in fund allocation, coordinate policies and laws related to communities, and promote positive actions within policy initiatives while maintaining relations with relevant entities. It should be noted that the position of the OCA director has been vacant for a number of years now.

Non-majority communities also have at their disposal the Consultative Council for Communities (CCC), which is located within the Office of the President of Kosovo and is among the special central-level community interests protection mechanisms. It advises the President on community matters, particularly in terms of the President's authority to promulgate laws adopted by the Assembly. The CCC is a constitutional category, and its functions are further elaborated in the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and Their Members. It was informally established in 2005 to conduct an advisory function with the Kosovo negotiation team in the Ahtisaari-led process and was then formally constituted by a presidential decree in 2008. It has a designated budget for its operations, which is used to fund a limited number of projects. Article 60 of the Constitution prescribes that the mandate of the CCC is to serve as a mechanism for regular communication between the communities and the authorities. It also enables communities to have early input into legal and policy initiatives of the government and other central institutions, and it can also propose legislative or policy initiatives on its own. It consists of community representatives and delegates from the Government, Office of the President, and other relevant agencies.

⁹ See the Constitution of Kosovo at: https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1. CONSTITUTION_OF_THE_ REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf When it comes to the Judiciary in Kosovo, it is organized based on the Constitution of Kosovo ⁹; however, certain parts deviate due to the Brussels Agreement on the Judiciary, which brought changes to the organization of the Judiciary, especially in the North of Kosovo. The Constitution stipulates that the Supreme Court and other courts in Kosovo are governed by law, with the Supreme Court being the highest judicial authority. The Supreme Court must have at least fifteen percent (15%) of its judges, but not fewer than three (3), from non-majority communities. The President of the Supreme Court is appointed and dismissed by the President of Kosovo for a non-renewable term of seven (7) years, based on the Kosovo Judicial Council's proposal. Presidents of other courts are appointed as per legal provisions.

For other courts with appeal jurisdiction, a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of judges, but not fewer than two (2), must be from non-majority communities. Following the Brussels Agreement on the Judiciary, the integration of the judiciary was completed when 40 judges and 13 prosecutors from non-majority communities, mostly Kosovo Serbs, took the oath before the President of Kosovo. In addition, 149 support staff, previously selected (115 for the courts and 34 for the prosecutor's offices) were also integrated.

Local Level

The regulatory framework related to citizen participation in Kosovo is diverse and encompasses many areas. However, the applicable regulations often leave a lot of space for municipal authorities to arrange their protocols within the legal framework and further concretize the municipal level rules. Depending on the municipal administrations' capacities, agility, and the leadership's willingness to apply the principles of participatory democracy in particular municipalities, the municipalities may implement these processes with different success levels.

Citizen participation and consultation processes lead to policy outcomes that better reflect the population's needs and expectations, draw upon local knowledge, and mitigate potential conflicts. Citizen participation and consultation help local government officials ensure their decisions align with public preferences, ultimately resulting in higher citizen satisfaction levels.

On the one hand, local institutions have a considerable number of possibilities to organize and facilitate citizen participation in decision-making processes. However, while legal, policy, and institutional provisions exist to allow citizen participation and help provide enough space for citizens to actively participate in local decision-making processes, these opportunities are not sufficiently utilized.

That being said, the Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR) is a key executive mechanism for non-majority communities at the local level. Its role and responsibilities are specified by a specific regulation (sublegal act), which stipulates that MOCRs have a mandate for identifying, implementing, and monitoring policies, as well as directly implementing activities and programs related to the protection and promotion of community rights and for supporting all returnees, refugees, and internally displaced persons. Their establishment is mandatory for each municipality. The Head of the Office proposes to the city mayor an annual budget to ensure the proper functioning of the Office and the implementation of projects and activities based on its responsibilities. The Head of the Office regularly reports to the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly Communities Committee.

Another very important mechanism on the local level for non-majority community participation is the Municipal Communities Committees. These committees are a municipal body composed of members from both the Municipal Assembly and community representatives. Each community residing in the municipality must have at least one representative in this committee, with community representatives forming the majority. The committee's primary responsibility is to scrutinize the municipal authorities' adherence to the law and assess all municipal policies, practices, and activities. It aims to ensure the full respect of the rights and interests of communities, making recommendations to the Municipal Assembly for appropriate measures. This includes fostering the expression, preservation, and development of ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identities, as well as ensuring robust protection of community rights within the municipality.

Additionally, in municipalities where at least ten percent of the population belongs to non-majority communities, a reserved position of the Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities is mandated. This position is exclusively designated for a representative from these communities. Furthermore, the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities will be appointed from the candidate of the non-majority community who secured the highest number of votes on the open list during the Municipal Assembly elections.

Finally, another non-majority participation mechanism is the appointment of the Deputy Mayor for Communities. The Deputy Mayor for Communities is elected for the same term as the Mayor and is appointed or dismissed based on the Mayor's proposal, subject to approval by the majority of municipal assembly members, including the majority belonging to non-majority communities. The Deputy Mayor for Communities assists and advises the Mayor on matters related to non-majority communities.

Situational Overview per Community...

Serb Community

- ¹⁰ Views, analysis, and factual information in this chapter have been obtained through regular monitoring by AKTIV and desk research, as well as through focus group and interviews conducted for the purposes of this report in March 2025.
- "SSee, for example, a reaction by the municipality upon one of such incidents at:https:// radiokontaktplus.org/en/News/ Municipality-of-Gracanica%2C-we-are-asking-for-protection%2C-but-the-police-do-not-have-the-capacity-to-ensure-peace/88255/?utm_source=chatgpt.com KThis point was also substantially discussed in the Gračanica/Graçanicë focus group conducted for this report
- ¹² KoSSev analysis on compliance with the Law on Language:https:// kossev.info/kosovo-online-latestnews-serbian-language-in-kosovoequal-in-law-marginalized-inpractice/

Overall, the Kosovo Serb community remains dissatisfied with their situation. While some of the issues that community representatives are reporting have lingered on over the years, the feedback obtained in the course of research for this report included a strong indication that matters have worsened in the most recent years. Without prompting, the vast majority of respondents assessed that in many significant respects the position of Kosovo Serbs significantly worsened during the tenure of the Kurtill government. In this regard, the respondents noted an overall perception from their community of a much more potent nationalism among Kosovo Albanians, expressed both in the social media space but also felt more directly. For example, incidents of ethnic-based provocation on the Gračanica/Graçanicë portion of the Pristina-Gjilan/Gnjilane road are much increased 11, while the reactions to Serbian language spoken in major shopping locations in Albanian areas are generally colder (albeit still without actual incidents). The abolishment of the Dinar and the closing of most Serbia-run institutions have created a major disruption in their every-day life of Kosovo Serbs and other community members who had been dependent on Dinar-based financial contributions from Serbia. Community representatives noted the continued outmigration of Serbs from Kosovo, which the respondents note is a trend that did not begin with the government established in 2021 under PM Albin Kurti but has intensified. In terms of the more lingering issues, the community continues to face languagerelated challenges 12 in their interactions with Kosovo institutions, which do not seem to have sufficient capacities for nor a coherent policy of Serbian-language service-provision. This is alleviated by the former policy of decentralization, which offered the basis for the provision of services by locally-present institutions staffed by Serbs, now undermined by the fact that Kosovo Serbs do not participate in the work of the four northern municipalities. Some post-conflict property-related issues linger on, particularly due to the slowness of court processes. With respect to property, the strongest complaint is related to expropriations of land (both municipal and private) by central Kosovo institutions, which the community perceives as non-transparent and against their interests. Below is a more detailed overview of pertinent issues outlined by the respondents.

Dinar Abolition and Impact on Local Businesses: Serbs were strongly affected by the decision made by the Kosovo Central Bank to abolish the use of the Serbian Dinar currency in early 2024. ¹³ This situation is consistent across the Serb population in Kosovo, with the only difference being the distance each individual must travel to reach the nearest Serbian town for withdrawing pensions, social assistance, salaries, and other forms of income. Namely, the strongest effect of the abolition is not the ability to use Dinar as a currency but the ability of community representatives to receive various forms of financial contributions from Serbia (salaries, pensions, social welfare). In this regard, by and large Kosovo Serbs now travel to Serbian municipalities adjacent to Kosovo to receive their finances from the Serbian state system.

New offices have been opened and ATMs set up in the Serbian municipalities adjacent to Kosovo for this purpose. An option exists for bank-to-bank transfers, most notably through the NLB bank, whereby one sets up an account in Serbia and orders the funds transferred to the corresponding bank in Kosovo, but, according to interviews and focus group discussions for this paper, people have generally not opted for this alternative due to transfer or conversion costs or simple financial illiteracy among some social groups (such as pensioners). The most vulnerable groups—such as people with health problems, the elderly, and returnees—are disproportionately impacted, as their ability to travel is limited, and the associated travel costs hinder their ability to purchase other necessary goods 14.

Additionally, as many are already traveling to withdraw money, they tend to purchase their necessities at the withdrawal destination (such as Raška or Novi Pazar), negatively affecting local businesses, including those owned by Serbs. As a result of this and related circumstances such as frequent inspections and administrative hurdles, many Serb-owned businesses are closing due to the inability to make a profit. These effects were extended by the Kosovo government's decision on restrictions to imports from Serbia, which started in mid-2023. Many Serb businesses, especially in the north, heavily relied on these imports. The situation was alleviated in October 2024, when the restriction was lifted, but only for one crossing point (Merdare), therefore still not providing for the full flow of trade as before the restriction. ¹⁵

¹³ Për më shumë informacion mbi imFor more on the implications of the Dinar abolishment, see the "Report on the Situation that Arose as a Result of the CBK Regulation," by AKTIV at: https://ngoaktiv.org/en/news/report-on-the-situation-that-arose-as-a-result-of-the-cbk-regulation/.

¹⁴ Testimonies of residents who receive their income in dinars https://www.gorazdevac.com/2024/02/06/povratnici-kojinisu-primili-dinarske-penzije-ocajnituzilastvo-ispituje-legalnost-novca/

¹⁵ For more on the business climate in northern Kosovo, see the report on "Difficult Times Amid Altered Dynamic: Difficult Times for Businesses in Northern Kosovo," by New Social Initiative at: https://newsocialinitiative.org/economichurdles-amid-altered-dynamic-difficult-times-for-businesses-in-northern-kosovo/

Closing of Serbian Institutions: The vast majority of Serbia-run institutions in Kosovo, except for those providing healthcare and education, have been closed in recent years ¹⁶. This has been conducted by the Kosovo government despite the expectation that such matters are to be addressed in the EU-facilitated Dialogue, presumably in the context of the expected Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. One of the latest waves of these closures also affected postal and social welfare offices. The strongest effect of the closure has been on obtaining civil documents required for obtaining services and various forms of assistance from the Serbian government. Since the closure, the community is resorting to obtaining these documents in Serbia. In some cases, beyond the costs and time involved this situation creates administrative hurdles previously inexistent. Many affected individuals also remain uncertain about where to turn for services previously handled by the now-closed institutions. In addition, the respondents are reporting a negative social effect of the closures, whereby work in the closed institutions had provided socialization (with colleagues) that is now absent. This is particularly prominent as an effect on women in rural environments, for whom going to work was one of the primary forms of socialization previously. As noted by the respondents, the psychosocial effects of the closures are contributing to the outmigration of Kosovo Serbs.

Serb Community Access to Kosovo Institutions: Respondents from the focus groups and interviews conducted for this report noted that Kosovo Serbs are generally dissatisfied with Kosovo institutions and lack trust in them, as well as that the community has limited interaction with these institutions, except for accessing basic services. Those who have approached Kosovo institutions report inconvenience and in some cases discrimination. A major barrier to accessing services is the lack of respect for language rights, particularly the failure to provide services in the Serbian language. This is particularly prominent, given the highest level of interaction stemming from every-day life, with regard to the Kosovo Police. Traffic tickets tend to be issued in Albanian language, the new generations of officers do not speak Serbian, whereas new Serb recruits tend to be sent to the north, leaving a language gap in areas south of Ibar. While there are some positive examples in certain municipalities they are largely dependent on local leadership efforts rather than being systematic.

¹⁶ Kosovo Authorities Shut Down Serbian-Run Institutions in Strpce and Leposavic: https://kossev. info/kosovo-latest-news-kosovoauthorities-shut-down-serbianrun-institutions-in-strpce-andleposavic/

Judicial services are also noted as better in this regard, both in terms of the existence of basic (municipality-based) courts staffed by local personnel (thus featuring Serbs in Serb-majority municipalities) and in terms of the more systemic provision of Serbian translation by higher-instance courts, although issues have been noted in terms of providing judgments in Serbian language and delays in procedure due to unavailability of translators. In general, the respondents report that Kosovo institutions do not sufficiently engage with the Serb community, and that information about programs and support schemes is primarily available in Albanian, on channels rarely followed by the Serb community. A 2024 report ¹⁷ by the Office of the Language Commissioner noted that municipalities in Kosovo decreased their adherence to the Law on the Use of Languages since 2019, that insufficiencies regarding the number of translators persist and are even increased in recent years, and that systemic solutions in this regard are still lacking across the board

Beyond language, the respondents have noted certain practices that they labelled discriminatory. One notable example given by the Gračanica/Graçanicë focus group was the procedure for applying for the age-based pension in Kosovo (a form of social welfare for the elderly, given based on age regardless of any particular work experience). Thus, as reported, only in Serb-majority areas the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare requires applicants to submit their Serbian ID card and if the ID notes a residents outside of Kosovo the application is denied. This additional document – often the reason for rejection – is not requested in other areas and thus appears to be required only from Kosovo Serbs, despite the fact that many other communities possess valid ID documents of other countries (eq. Germany, Switzerland).

¹⁷ See the report on the "Implementation of the Law on the Use of Languages in Municipalities and Basic Courts," by the Office of the Language Commissioner of Kosovo, at https://oik-rks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ENG_Report_2024.pdf

18 For more on disinformation patterns, see a National Democratic Institute 2023 report at: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/INFORMATION%20 DISORDERS%20IN%20 KOSOVO%20-%20 2023-compressed_o.pdf .

- ¹⁹ For disinformation patterns by Serbian media, see a CRTA 2023 report at:https://seenpm.org/ wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ Resilience-research-publication-1-SRB-ENG.pdf.
- 2º See for example these SOC statements on two such cases at: https://eparhija-prizren.com/en/ statements/kosovo-ministry-ofculture-reconstructs-orthodoxchurch-at-gornje-vinarce-ascatholic-without-consultingserbian-church/ i https://eparhijaprizren.com/en/statements/romancatholic-mass-served-groundsorthodox-church-st-nicholas-novobrdo-diocese-raska-pr/.
- ²¹ See for example this statement by the SOC at: https://eparhijaprizren.com/en/news/diocesancommunique-most-recent-mediaattack-serbian-orthodox-church-sholy-sites-kosovo-and-me/.
- ²² See for example this statement by the SOC at: https://eparhijaprizren.com/en/statements/ response-of-the-raska-prizrendiocese-soc-regarding-recentaccusations-in-certain-kosovomedia-and-on-social-networks/
- ²³ See for example in the regular UNMIK report at: https://unmik. unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ 5_2024_741-en.pdf

Media Reporting: Examples of hate speech and harmful rhetoric are mostly found on social media, and to a lesser extent in traditional media. Inflammatory rhetoric has been posted by regular citizens, as well as some officials and journalists. Albanian official media outlets and newspapers generally maintain professional reporting standards, but they have at times spread misinformation by running stories from unverified sources that could fuel ethnic tensions 18. These outlets tend to focus on negative aspects of the Serb community in Kosovo, while positive stories are rarely covered. In some sensitive news coverage, alarmist reporting has at times contributed to outbreaks of violence. In general, media in Serbia and at times Albanianlanguage media from Kosovo have been more likely to spread misinformation and divisive rhetoric compared to the most notable Serbian-language media in Kosovo, which are seen as more inclined to mitigate inflammatory rhetoric. 19 Information in Serbian language was reduced by the 2023 Kosovo government decision on import restrictions from Serbia, which also affected Serbian print media. Serbian-language media have continued to face issues with regards to reporting on institutional life in Kosovo due to the generally insufficient level of compliance with the Law on the Use of Languages.

Religion and Culture: There is a recurring, albeit not widespread, pattern of declaring some Serbian Orthodox churches and sites as Catholic, especially those that are abandoned or in ruins 20. Additionally, there are claims questioning the legal ownership of properties by the Serbian Orthodox Church, alleging that the Church took them over from other religions in the past ²¹. Unfounded stories, including accusations like the claim that some monasteries are hiding weapons for a potential insurgency, have been circulating on occasion 22. The most notable land ownershiprelated case was that of the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Dečani. Its land was only registered in the municipal cadastral records in 2024, long after a Constitutional Court decision on the matter (in 2016), after significant international pressure related to Kosovo's membership with the Council of Europe. In the view of the respondents from the Kosovo Serb community, the Kosovo authorities' rhetoric over the years on this issue has been contrary to the spirit of reconciliation and coexistence. In July 2024, the municipality of Deçan/Dečani reclassified part of the Visoki Dečani monastery's special protective zone as an urban area in its draft spatial plan, which could lead to infrastructure projects there and thus threaten the status of the religious site and its special zone. During 2024, Serbian Orthodox religious sites experienced a number of cases of vandalism, tree cutting, garbage dumping, break-ins, and similar illegal activities 23. In some cases, authorities have taken actions without properly coordinating with the Church. Serbian Orthodox believers remain unable to freely express their faith or observe traditional customs.

The status of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Kosovo remains insufficiently regulated, as is the case with other religious communities. In this regard, new laws - on religious freedoms and on cultural heritage – have remained pending for a number of years, along with the provision of the 2023 Path to Normalization Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia that called for the regulation of the SOC status. Following a protracted impasse, the Implementation and Monitoring Council (IMC) – a body consisting of relevant government ministries, SOC, and international organizations (EU and OSCE), tasked with supervision of implementation on special protective zones – was re-functionalized in 2024. Under the Law on Special Protective Zones, one of the derivatives of the Ahtisaari Final Settlement Plan for Kosovo, there are 43 SPZs, the vast majority of which are around SOC sites. The SPZs protect these sites from unwanted construction and in terms of upholding the monastic way of life. The SPZs legal provisions are generally upheld, including in terms of a special police unit that ensures their security. In addition to regular security surveillance, Kosovo Police has acted on a number of occasions against infringements against SPZ sites, such as in response to illegal logging and field cultivation, whereas the IMC was able to successfully address the issue of an unauthorized road construction in relation to one of the SOC sites.

In May 2024, the Kosovo government prevented the SOC Patriarch Porfirije and other SOC dignitaries from entering Kosovo, where they were scheduled to preside over an assembly of bishops at the SOC Patriarchate of Peć ²⁴. The assembly is an annual event for which Kosovo authorities previously allowed SOC Patriarchs to enter Kosovo. Patriarch Porfirije was returned from a crossing point with Kosovo, while en route to the Patriarchate.

²⁴ See more at: https://kossev.info/ en/kosovo-news-patriarch-porfirijeorthodox-church/

Investments in Infrastructure in Serb-Populated Areas: In the north, those interviewed for this report noted that the latest investments in Serb-majority municipalities have mostly been focused on villages and areas inhabited by the Albanian community, as well as areas surrounding Kosovo Police bases, rather than areas where Serbs reside. In the eastern part of Kosovo, the only significant government investment is a regional road (Prishtina-Gjilan/Gnjilne-Dheu i Bardhë/Bela Zemlja), which will also benefit the Serb population – especially from the Serbmajority municipalities in Gjilan/Gnjilane region and Gračanica/ Graçanicë – once completed. In central Kosovo, there were no new investments, and the existing infrastructure was not sufficiently maintained. Several areas remain without lighting, proper manholes, and clean rivers. The latest investment, funded by the EU, was for building a school. In the west, one Serbinhabited village benefited from investments.

Property Issues: Community representatives report that property issues persist for the Serb community. Property owners continue to face challenges trying to regain possession through judicial processes, largely due to prolonged court processes and complicated burden of proof with the passing of time. One new illegal occupation of properties occurred in 2024 ²⁵. Some Serb-owned properties in city centers have been usurped over the years, with limited institutional action taken to remedy the situation. Community representatives report dissatisfaction regarding the effectiveness of law enforcement's response to burglaries, noting that they tend to be unresolved. In some cases, such as Gračanica/Graçanicë, part of the issue is the low number of police officers available to respond and then follow up on burglaries. During 2024, 17 incidents were reported against the property of Kosovo Serbs. ²⁶

A notable point of grievance by the community are the expropriations in Serb-majority municipalities conducted by the Kosovo central institutions in recent years. By and large, the community sees these expropriations as non-transparent, carried out through irregular procedures, and without appropriate consideration for the interests of the affected Kosovo Serbs. The most broadly cited cases are the 2024 expropriations by the Kosovo government in Zubin Potok and Leposaviq/Leposavić, conducted for the purposes of raising police bases ²⁷. The cases were cited in the 2023 Kosovo report by the European Commission, which also noted that several court rulings have been made in favor of Serb complainants from the two municipalities, finding that the expropriations had not followed the legal procedures in terms of providing a justification of legitimate public interest. ²⁸

²⁵ See the OSCE Property Monitor report at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/7/588101.pdf

²⁶ See the OSCE Property Monitor report at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/3/574442.pdf

²⁷ For more on the expropriation and other property and human right issues, see the report on the "Human Rights Situation in North Kosovo," by AKTIV at: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Human-rights-situation-in-Northern-Kosovo-1.pdf

²⁸ See the EU 2023 Kosovo Report at: https://enlargement.ec.europa. eu/document/download/760aacca-4e88-4667-8792-3ed08cdd65c3_ en?filename=SWD_2023_692%20 Kosovo%20report_0.pdf

²⁹ For more on the expropriations in the two affected municipalities, see UN Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) at:https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2024_741-en.pdf

³⁰ See the OSCE Property Rights Monitor at: https://www.osce.org/ files/f/documents/1/3/574442.pdf

³¹ See more on the petrol stations issue at:https://kossev.info/exfis-and-google-show-that-they-know-more-than-the-privatization-agency-kosovo-online-latest-news/

In May 2024, the Kosovo government followed up with a decision expropriating land in the two affected municipalities, despite the mentioned court decision, and in July the expropriated land in Zubin Potok was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A second-instance court decision on the matter is pending ²⁹. Respondents in Gračanica/Graçanicë also noted two ongoing expropriation processes by the Kosovo government, affecting municipal-owned land. One is for a mental hospital and another is for cultural heritage preservation related to the Roman site of Ulpiana. As reported, there were no public hearings on the matter and the municipality was only informed of the initiation of expropriation processes after a government decision was taken. The municipality has thus filed a legal challenge in this regard. At the same time and in particular with regards to the land expropriated for the mental hospital, the community believes that the choice for the location is inadequate for the purpose. A regular OSCE publication entitled Property Rights Monitor, published in mid-2024, noted that 211 private properties belonging to Kosovo Serbs were subject to expropriation in Kosovo during the reporting period (January-June 2024), all in the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Pejë/Peć regions. 30

In mid-2024 the Privatization Agency of Kosovo closed five petrol stations in the northern municipalities due to their lack of license by the Kosovo institutions. A public tender was subsequently issued over the petrol stations, which was concluded with awarding contracts to Kosovo Albanian petrol companies. ³¹

Political Representation and Advocacy: Since Serbs from the four northern municipalities left Kosovo institutions in 2022, there has been a representation vacuum, leaving the Serb community without a voice to address their concerns. This is especially acute as regards the Assembly of Kosovo andin terms of local governance in the northern municipalities. Political representatives have shown a lack of understanding of their constituents' needs, particularly outside of election cycles. The Serb community feels unrepresented and unheard, not just by political representatives but also by Belgrade, Pristina, and the international community. While Serb political representatives remain in their posts in areas south of Ibar, particularly in local government, issues in terms of effective representation are still being cited. Communication between the Srpska Lista-run municipalities and the central government ministries is limited or non-existent, resulting in lack of investment in these municipalities and various administrative impediments. It is apparent that the local governments of these municipalities are unable to undertake any initiative that has dimensions related to central government jurisdiction and thus requires local-central cooperation. In Štrpce/Shteprcë, this situation has also had adverse effects on the management of the Brezovica ski resort, whereby central government interventions over its management are negatively perceived by the municipality 32. A similar issue pertains to a wouldbe by-pass road around Gračanica/Graçanicë, whose construction was raised as a possibility since 2015 but it has not been completed. Problems persist in other spheres too, as reported by the respondents for this report; for example, in Gračanica/Graçanicë, poor communication between the local Kosovo Police station and the municipality causes limitations in policing and reduced ability of the citizens to enter a dialogue with the police.

³² SSee more at:https://telegrafi. com/sq/qendra-e-skijimitbrezovica-potencial-kosoves-apokaos/

Law enforcement and judiciary: Specificities regarding policing in the four northern Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities have continued throughout 2024, albeit with a level of normalization compared to the previous year. Following on from various security incidents throughout 2021 and 2022, the defining moment with respect to policing was the resignation of local Serbs from all Kosovo institutions in November 2022. 33 Over 500 Serb police officers resigned, which created a law enforcement vacuum and ultimately lowered the trust in the Kosovo Police among the local Serbs as the resigned officers became replaced by Kosovo Albanian ones. In particular, the presence of special police units, composed entirely of ethnic Albanians, has been a potent source of grievance by the local Serb community. These units are seen as a source of repression rather than protection, especially during their more active phase of patrolling and check-point searches. The perception of ethnic-driven policing by special units in the north was underpinned by their social media glorification. In many instances, as found by a joint CSO study of December 2024 34, Kosovo Police officers have used social media, especially TikTok, to promote Albanian national and nationalistic tones, violating at least 13 disciplinary regulations and Kosovo's constitution. The study identified over 14,000 posts related to the Kosovo Police, with the hashtag #njesiaspecialekosoves (translation: special police unit of Kosovo) alone generating 270 million views. Many of these posts use nationalist music, portraying the police as advancing Albanian national/istic goals rather than Ahtisaari's vision of Kosovo as a multiethnic state. The above cited civil society report includes over 140 photographs of 300 officers displaying illegal insignia, national symbols, and gestures, undermining the civic and multiethnic character of Kosovo's security institutions.

related issues in north Kosovo over 2022 and 2023, see the report on "Unmasking Security Challenges within the Kosovo Serb Community," by AKTIV at: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/ uploads/2023/11/Unmasking-Security-Challanges_Final-1.pdf

³⁴ See the report on the "Ethnization of Kosovo Police: Erosion of Ahtisaari's Basis a Civic and Multiethnic Institution," by civil society in north Kosovo at:https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Ethnization-of-Kosovo-Police-ENG-1_compressed-1.pdf

³⁵ The full list of the referenced cases is in the AKTIV database and it was noted among several interviewees for this report.

³⁶ For more on the case, see: https://kossev.info/mitrovicaresident-alleges-police-abuse-afterdetention-incident-kosovo-policedeny-claims/

A level of upgrade have been made to the situation meanwhile: in July 2023 a public call for new officers was made and additional 74 police men and women from non-majority communities – including 45 Serbs – were deployed in the north. In January 2025, the graduation ceremony for the 61st generation of Kosovo Police cadets took place, encompassing 462 new officers of whom 79 were Serbs. The vast majority of the new Serb cadets came from areas south of Ibar, but they have by and large been deployed to the north. While the new recruits improve the policing disposition in the north, the respondents from Serb municipalities south of Ibar reported a continued deficit of Serb officers there that is negatively affecting policing. For example, the function of the regional police commander for the northern region is still conducted by a Kosovo Albanian officer (previous deputy, not originally from north Kosovo), whereby the community believes that a capable Kosovo Serb officer could be found in areas south of Ibar to be transferred to this function. Likewise, the special police units have meanwhile reduced their check-point activity, which has altogether led to an improved sense of normalization when it comes to north Kosovo security.

The local Serb community continues to negatively perceive the special units and is looking forward to full normalization that would feature reduced special units presence and a much increased regular policing conducted by a force that mirrors the local ethnic composition. Periodic claims of excessive policing are contributing to this perception. A number of such incidents occurred in 2024, despite the overall improvement. This included cases³⁵ of unauthorized search of mobile phones, verbal intimidation, excessive use of force, detention mistreatment, and various procedural violations (such as insufficient involvement of prosecutors in planned operations, delays in access to defense attorneys, and extended pre-trial detentions). Notable was the case of Miloš Subotić from Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North, who alleged that he was physically maltreated by Kosovo Police in the course of his apprehension and detention in October 2024, as well as that a number of his other rights had been denied. The case was met by a strong outcry by the local community and civil society and was addressed through the Kosovo Police Inspectorate, which recommended suspension for two police officers involved but subsequently allowed their return to work pending an ongoing investigation ³⁶.

- ³⁷ For more on the case, see: https://kossev.info/kosovo-onlinelatest-news-serbian-democracyparty-leader-faces-48-hourdetention-civil-society-calls-forimmediate-release/
- ³⁸ See the Annual Kosovo Ombudsperson report at: https://oik-rks.org/en/2025/03/28/ the-ombudsperson-submittedthe-annual-report-for-2024-tothe-assembly-of-the-republic-ofkosovo/

Another case that received wide community and media attention was that of Kosovo Serb politician Aleksandar Arsenijević, who was originally apprehended by Kosovo Police during a visit by Prime Minister Albin Kurti to the north in September 2024 for blowing a whistle in the Prime Minister's vicinity as a sign of protest. Mr Arsenijević was released after a few hours, but was then detained several more times during the year over the same issue: protest whistle-blowing in the vicinity of public authorities (police, local, central government representatives). Among the local community, but also among notable Kosovo Albanian CSOs, the Arsenijević case was perceived as an illegal arrest and obstruction of the right to peaceful protest. ³⁷

During the year, the Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo received 59 complaints for excessive use of force by Kosovo Police, of which 25 were accepted as admissible. The number of reported cases in this category is significantly higher than the average of recent years. The Kosovo Police Inspectorate received 7 cases related to excessive force or similar violations, which have resulted in the suspension of three officers. ³⁸

In other Serb-majority municipalities (i.e. south of Ibar), the overall security situation did not exibit the features found in the north, although respondents have noted a general raise in nationalism. Rather, the respondents have noted that the fact that interest in police work among young Serbs has dropped significantly compared to previous years, as many view the Kosovo Police as politically instrumentalized and hostile toward the Serb community. Additionally, the Serbs who do apply and get recruited tend to be sent to the north, leaving Serb areas south of Ibar with a reduced presence of Serb officers. In combination with the fact that the newly recruited Albanian officers by and large do not speak Serbian, instances of communication only in Albanian – verbal or written (traffic tickets and similar) – have increased. Respondents from Gračanica/Graçanicë have reported an increase in ethnic-based provocation that has intensified on their portion of the Pristina-Gjilan/Gnjilane road, which they perceive as inappropriately addressed by the local Kosovo Police.

³⁹ See the President's press statement on the appointment:https://president-ksgov.net/en/the-president-of-the-republic-of-kosovo-vjosa-osmani-at-the-proposal-of-the-judicial-council-of-kosovo-has-decreed-one-judge-with-an-initial-mandate/

⁴⁰ See more at: https:// radiokontaktplus.org/en/News/ announcement-of-eight-nvo-100-appointed-notaries%2Cnone-from-the-Serbiancommunity/76618/ Regarding the work of judicial institutions, all Serb members of the north Kosovo integrated judiciary also left these institutions at the same time as the police (November 2022). According to available data, a total of 25 judges, 10 prosecutors, and around 140 additional staff members resigned from their positions. The competent Kosovo institutions have not yet made decisions regarding the resignations of Serb judges and prosecutors, and these are currently under review. In the meantime, the authorities have temporarily reassigned staff from other regions to northern Mitrovica, but the number of staff remains low. Due to reduced capacity, a large number of cases are on hold, with only urgent cases being processed, while the backlog of unresolved cases has increased

In Serb-majority municipalities south of Ibar the situation is different. Serb judges, prosecutors and staff have not left these institutions and the presence of basic courts in municipalities – staffed in line with the local ethnic disposition – is a significant feature of their generally positive perception among the community. Respondents have noted ease with dealing with their local courts (featuring Serb personnel), but were also generally positive in terms of provision of translation and interpretation by higher-instance courts (featuring a majority of Albanian personnel), which appears to be more systematic then average for other Kosovo institutions. Some issues persist as regards the publishing of judgments in Serbian. During 2024, the Kosovo Judicial Council included three Kosovo Serbs in its recommendation for the position of judges, with only one of them ultimately appointed by President Viosa Osmani 39. Only one authorized Kosovo Serb notary operates in Kosovo, despite a recent recruitment call to fill 100 notary positions that should have included eight (8) Kosovo Serbs but the Ministry of Justice did not appoint a single one, even though reportedly qualified candidates existed from among the community 40. The prisons also lack Serbian-speaking staff, including where Serbianspeakers constitute a significant number of the serving prisoners.

41 See at: https://radiokontaktplus.org/en/main/80400/80400/

Education: One of the key challenges for Serbian-curriculum schools is the drastic reduction in student numbers, in some cases dropping to zero per class, due to migration and unfavorable socio-political conditions. Our respondents noted a recent piece of information published by media and the education authorities that the school year 2024/25 saw the registration of around 1,000 pupils less in Serbian-curriculum high schools throughout Kosovo⁴¹. From their own experience, the respondents also reported the outmigration of young people in the years immediately following education: thus one of the respondents finished high school in 2016 in a class of 29 pupils, among whom only 10 remain in Kosovo today. They also noted a number of technical classes that no longer exist, for example in Gračanica/ Graçanicë area, due to a lack of students. Additionally, there is a lack of transparency in the hiring of teachers. Although there have been occasional job openings in recent years, the process is often seen as non-transparent and does not reflect the actual school needs. Moreover, a portion of schools operate in small, inadequately equipped buildings, often lacking essential spaces. The lack of investment in school infrastructure negatively impacts the learning environment. School textbooks are also not available in Kosovo. The respondents noted that until a few years ago there had been ways for the schools to obtain textbooks, whereas now it is left to the parents to obtain them in Serbia and "smuggle them into Kosovo." Finally, students in Serbian-curriculum schools lack access to broader cultural and educational experiences, such as museum visits, exhibitions, and performances.

Health: The Serbia-run health system in Kosovo faces some of the same issues as the education system: outmigration, building and equipment shortages and maintenance, finances and management. Among the key issues that have arisen in the recent years is the unavailability of medicines from Serbia. They have not been available even after the opening of trade with Serbia in 2024, as they remain illegal to sell in Kosovo. The Serbia-run hospitals thus have a major shortage of state-financed medicines, and thus patients and their families have to resort to purchasing alternatives in the local market or travelling to Serbia. While Serbia-run medical facilities are allowed to continue operations, a notable case occurred in January 2024 when the Kosovo Police shut down a small community center in Pristina, located next to the police HQ. In addition to serving as a community hub, the center provided limited and basic medical care and transported its visitors to hospitals in Serb areas when needed.

⁴² For more, see at: https:// telegrafi.com/en/lejohet-votimidokumente-identifikimi-tekosoves-afat-te-skaduar/

Elections: The 9 February 2025 elections in Kosovo were marred by significant organizational failures. These shortcomings particularly affected the Kosovo Serb community and displaced persons (IDPs) residing in Serbia. One of the major concerns was the lack of access to election-related information in Serbian, despite it being an official language. The Central Election Commission (CEC) failed to provide timely updates in Serbian on its website and social media platforms, making it difficult for Serbian-speaking voters to stay informed. The voter information campaign was also inadequate, with most materials published primarily in Albanian and notable effort to ensure broader reach. Further issues included the nomination and appointment of Polling Station Committees (PSCs), particularly in northern Kosovo, which raised concerns about transparency. The process for election complaints and appeals was not effectively communicated to Serbian-speaking voters. Additionally, the CEC's last-minute decision to allow expired ID cards for voting created inconsistencies among different voter groups 42. Another critical issue was the de facto exclusion of the displaced persons residing in Serbia from Out-of-Kosovo (OoK) voting due to the inexistent postal service between Kosovo and Serbia. This is not directly a CEC issue, but the election authorities were aware that the displaced in Serbia would have no recourse for by-mail voting without any additional facilitation, as had been clear in previous election cycles.

Recommendations

- The Government of Kosovo should look for ways to alleviate community issues related to the abolition of the Dinar. Special arrangements could be pursued, including expansion of banking services in Serb areas and cooperation with the banking sector over easier and cheaper transfers from Serbian banks.
- The Government of Kosovo should engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Serb community throughout Kosovo to hear and respond to their needs, in particular in terms of institutional delivery.

- The Government of Kosovo should make all efforts to enable and facilitate full normalization in northern Kosovo. This includes working with elected representatives of the community, civil society and grassroots associations, toward the full return of Serbs into Kosovo institutions. With full normalization, the Government should consider a reduction or full withdrawal of Kosovo Police special units from the north.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kosovo Police should continue recruiting members of the Kosovo Serb community into the police and increase their presence both north and south of the river Ibar. Efforts at investigating claims of excessive policing should be enhanced, including through an expanded presence of the Kosovo Police Inspectorate in the north.
- The Kosovo central institutions should demonstrate more flexibility towards the Serbowned businesses in the north, allowing them appropriate time and administrative clarity for registering businesses with the Kosovo system.
- The Government of Kosovo and responsible line ministries should enhance communication and cooperation with the leadership of Serb-majority municipalities throughout Kosovo and enable seamless governance cooperation over projects crucial for the local community.
- The Government of Kosovo should enhance transparency and dialogue with the community members and municipalities affected by land expropriation and conduct any expropriation in line with established procedures, laws, and court decisions.
- Matters related to the Serbia-run institutions in Kosovo should be addressed through the EU-facilitated normalization dialogue and/or through close communication with the affected community.
- Provision of Serbian-language services by Kosovo institutions should be more systemic and based on a concrete administrative policy, rather than ad hoc. Recommendations of the Kosovo Language Commissioner should be adhered more strictly.
- Matters related to diploma recognition should be addressed as a priority, with special administrative arrangements to allow for accreditation of diplomas from schools and universities in Serbia as a good will gesture that enhances employability of the community in Kosovo.
- Improve the elections-related voter information campaign by ensuring equal language representation, particularly in Serbian, and expanding outreach efforts through paid advertisements. Enforce the Law on the Use of Languages by making all election-related content available in all recognized languages in Kosovo across all official platforms.
- Consider special arrangements for Out-of-Kosovo (OoK) voting for the displaced residing in Serbia to ensure their participation. Consider involving the OSCE in this regard, as had been the case in the past.
- Enhance transparency in appointing Polling Station Committees (PSCs) to ensure a fair and impartial election process. Enhance coordination among municipal election commissions in Serbmajority municipalities and the Central Election Commission.

Gorani Community 43

43 Previous assessments of community issues is available from the report on the "Assessment of the Status of Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo: the Roadmap for the Improvement of Rights of Non-Majority Communities," by AKTIV:https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mapa-puta-za-unapredjenje-prava-nevecinskihzajednica-ENG-1.pdf

Institutional access in the Gorani language: Institutional access to the Gorani language is limited, with Serbian and Bosnian (that this community are generally familiar with) officially recognized but inconsistently implemented. Municipal notices and assembly meetings are often poorly translated or not translated at all. In courts and police, language barriers make it difficult for citizens to communicate their issues. Important notices, such as subsidies, are delayed and sometimes shared only on private profiles rather than official channels

Economic and employment status of the Gorani community:

The economic and employment situation for the Gorani community remains challenging, with few local job opportunities and institutional initiatives failing to address their needs. While some central-level programs for youth employment existed, they required travel to Pristina, which was impractical for many from Dragash/Dragaš. Ministries were supposed to hire 10% of minority members, but this was not effectively implemented due to low application rates.

Subsidies were minimal and often politically influenced, benefiting entities linked to certain political figures while excluding small Gorani and Bosniak households due to high eligibility criteria.

Security situation: The number of thefts in the border areas of Dragash/Dragaš has significantly decreased in 2024 compared to previous years. While there used to be 5–6 thefts per month, including house break-ins and livestock theft, the total recorded incidents dropped to fewer than 10 for the entire year. This improvement is attributed to increased border patrols, particularly by special units from Pristina and the presence of KFOR, rather than local Dragash/Dragaš police. In contrast, thefts remained largely unresolved for over two decades in the past, likely due to perpetrators coming from Albania and weak police responses.

Kosovo Police Recruitment: The number of Gorani police officers in Kosovo has increased significantly over the past three years, with 20–30 new recruits, compared to just one or two every two years in the past decade. Each new generation of officers now includes 5–7 Gorani members, which is a positive but still insufficient number. More efforts are needed to encourage young Gorani to apply. However, no Gorani have joined the Kosovo Security Force (Army), nor has anyone applied.

Initiatives to support the Gorani youth: The Gorani youth has limited support from both institutions and civil society. While some NGOs exist, they are often politically connected and focus mainly on cultural events rather than addressing youth issues. Young Gorani people are increasingly looking to move to Europe, as local job opportunities are scarce. Infrastructure in Dragash/Dragaš is poor, with frequent power outages and unmet basic needs, further worsening the situation. The Office for Communities, which is supposed to support youth through startup projects, has failed to function effectively.

Key education issues: Key education issues for the Gorani community include outdated infrastructure, poor conditions in many schools, and a lack of investment. As noted by respondents interviewed for this report, despite more than two decades since the establishment of a Kosovo education framework, schools still use old equipment, with some schools lacking basic necessities like heating and proper materials.

The education system for Gorani children is divided between those who follow the Serbian curriculum and those who follow the Kosovo curriculum delivered in Bosnian. A level of pressure has been noted in recent years by the Kosovo institutions directed towards closing the Serbia-run schools in Dragash/Dragaš, but has not led to the closure of the system in the municipality. Overall, the future of education and youth prospects in the community remain unresolved.

Tourist potential of Gora: Gora has significant tourism potential, but development has been hindered by political structures within both the Bosniak and Gorani communities. Tourism benefits are often redirected to the majority communities, with examples like the hotel in Brod, which is owned by the majority and offers little to the Gorani community.

The development of hydropower plants in the region has negatively impacted the ecological environment, and the Gorani have not benefited from these projects. Despite contracts promising that 50% of the energy produced would be directed to the region, the Gorani still lack access to electricity, and funds from the plants primarily benefit the majority community, with few employment opportunities for Gorani people.

Property- or security-related concerns: The Gorani community faces significant challenges with domestic violence and property seizure. Institutions are largely unresponsive, with slow court processes, ineffective police actions, and frequent releases of abusers, leaving women with nowhere to go, often forcing them to leave their homes. Additionally, many Gorani have faced illegal land appropriation by the majority community, with old documents often not recognized. Legal processes are slow, leaving people without their rightful land and causing ongoing conflicts.

Dinar abolition and closure of Serbian institutions in Kosovo:

As noted by community representatives in the course of research for this report, the abolition of the Dinar and Serbian institutions in Kosovo has significantly impacted the Gorani community, especially in the initial months. They faced difficulties in transportation, paying up to 50 euros for private vans to get to Raška. Eventually, they managed to open accounts to send money directly from Serbia, but the banks charge a monthly fee of ten euros, along with additional account maintenance costs. This system has added financial strain, particularly for those in difficult situations, and posed challenges in accessing necessary medicines, despite eventually resolving some of the initial problems.

Recently emerging issues or improvements: In 2024, the Gorani community faces several significant challenges. Some Kosovo Albanian groups, particularly from the region of Opolje in Dragash/Dragaš, have been exerting pressure through social media, making fabricated accusations and creating an atmosphere of fear. This has contributed to the emigration of more than 30% of the Gorani population since 2011, as estimated by respondents for this report, with many leaving due to a lack of political, economic, and social protection. Domestic violence remains a serious issue, with ineffective police and judiciary responses, compounded by many Gorani police officers becoming part of a system that fails to address these problems. Farmers in the region also struggle with a lack of subsidies and support, causing some to consider selling their livestock and leaving.

Political Representation and Advocacy: Political representatives have largely been ineffective in advocating for the rights and well-being of the Gorani community. The community feels abandoned, with political parties uninterested or unwilling to resolve their issues, leaving remittances from the diaspora as their only source of support. This situation reflects a deep deficit in political representation and institutional protection for the Gorani.

Recommendations

- Spearheaded by the Ministry of Justice, the Government of Kosovo should enhance protection against domestic violence and ensure better protection for Gorani community members at risk.
- The Kosovo central institutions should strengthen the legal framework to prevent illegal land appropriation and streamline court processes for property disputes.
- The Government of Kosovo should improve employment opportunities for Gorani youth by decentralizing access to state-sponsored training and employment programs.
- The Government of Kosovo should provide better agricultural subsidies and targeted economic support to sustain local farming and livestock businesses, as well as strengthen monitoring of public funds to ensure fair distribution to Gorani businesses and households.
- The Ministry of Education should improve school infrastructure and ensure access to modern educational materials, including Serbian/Bosnian language resources.
- Provision of Serbian- and Bosnian-language services by Kosovo institutions should be more systemic and based on a concrete administrative policy, rather than ad hoc. Recommendations of the Kosovo Language Commissioner should be adhered more strictly.
- The Government of Kosovo, media regulators, and civil society should engage in countering social media-driven intimidation against Gorani individuals and communities through community engagement and awareness campaigns.

Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian Communities

44 Previous assessments of community issues is available from the report on the "Assessment of the Status of Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo: the Roadmap for the Improvement of Rights of Non-Majority Communities," by AKTIV: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mapa-puta-za-unapredjenje-prava-nevecinskihzajednica-ENG-1.pdf

⁴⁵See the report at: https://api. raportodiskriminimin.org/uploads/ documents_publications/f6afcf78fe49-4940-ba51-b4a51a3895e8.pdf Access to services and socio-economic integration: noted by respondents for this report and as found in other reports on community issues, Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities face significant socio-economic challenges. including limited access to education, healthcare, and social services. Integration efforts are often insufficient, relying heavily on short-term, externally funded projects rather than long-term, systemic support from local and central institutions. There is a lack of comprehensive, sustainable strategies for community development, leading to the loss of progress once external funding ends. Discrimination, administrative obstacles, and a divide between Kosovo and Serbian service systems exacerbate the situation. Additionally, high school dropout rates and limited employment opportunities further contribute to socio-economic instability. During 2024, the Government of Kosovo published a report 45 on the implementation of its Strategy on Kosovo Roma and Ashkali Communities. The report noted upgrades in terms of their integration, in particular the employment quotas, support by the education ministry for their education, and the resolution of more than 10 cases of discrimination reported through the national platform for the protection against discrimination. Children exploitation for labor and begging is particularly high among members of these communities.

Significant initiatives to enhance their access to institutions, health, economy, employment: There are some initiatives aimed at enhancing access to institutions, health, economy, and employment for non-majority communities, in part resulting from the Government Strategy, but mostly from project-based initiatives without permanent support. These initiatives are often funded by international organizations and NGOs, with limited involvement from local and central government institutions. While there are government plans, such as affirmative action for employment and a 10% quota for minority communities, their practical implementation is insufficient. Measures adopted by the government, especially post-pandemic, are sometimes politically motivated and not tailored to the specific needs of the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, which limits their effectiveness in creating long-term, positive change. Child mortality rate among these communities are higher than the Kosovo average, influenced by their socio-economic status and access to healthcare facilities.

Patterns of discrimination: Community representatives explained that discrimination against Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities is often institutional and systemic, with a lack of positive discrimination or proactive measures to support vulnerable groups. It manifests in various sectors such as education, media, and employment, with hate speech also becoming more prevalent in recent years. While institutions are expected to protect minority communities, they often fail to do so effectively, leaving marginalized groups feeling like second-class citizens. In the workplace, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities face obstacles, and while there have been some small improvements, there are still individual cases of discrimination that highlight persistent issues. Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, in particular, suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure, which further reinforces their marginalization. Although institutions have started to take some steps, such as creating platforms for anonymously reporting discrimination, these efforts remain insufficient to address the broader, systemic challenges.

Significant new institutional program for the communities arising in 2024: In 2024, there have been no significant positive changes for the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities. The economic situation remains challenging, with many still relying on low-incom e, informal work such as collecting secondary raw materials or begging. Despite efforts to implement programs, such as the 10% employment quota, these have not been effectively implemented, and the lack of concrete institutional support continues. There are no significant new programs or developments that would notably improve the livelihoods or socioeconomic integration of these communities. Economic stability, which remains a key issue, is still out of reach for many, and without this stability, the overall situation for these communities has not seen substantial improvement.

Assessment of the efficiency of anti-discrimination mechanisms:

In 2024, the effectiveness of anti-discrimination mechanisms remains limited, largely due to a lack of awareness about rights and fear of consequences. Many citizens are not familiar with their legal rights or the anti-discrimination framework, which makes it difficult for them to identify when they are being discriminated against. Even when discrimination occurs, people often choose not to report it for fear of causing complications or facing further difficulties. For instance, individuals who are not proficient in the local language (Albanian or Serbian) may not receive services in their language or access interpreters, yet they often remain silent to avoid confrontation. This lack of awareness and reluctance to speak out perpetuates a cycle where discrimination goes unreported and unresolved.

Education: In 2024, education for the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities has seen some progress, with more young people graduating high school and attending universities. This was in part the result of scholarships offered by the Kosovo government for higher secondary education that assist community members with expenses related to schooling outside their place of residence. However, high dropout rates, open or subtle discrimination, early marriage and poverty continue to effect these communities' education more than any other communities in Kosovo, including as regards Serbia-run schools that a prortion of Roma community attends. Although classes in the Romani language are offered in Prizren and some other areas through international initiatives, it remains elective and not widely implemented. Textbooks exist, but Romani language education is underdeveloped, and many municipalities lack proper integration. These issues contribute to low secondary school completion rates and limited career prospects for educated Roma.

Civil documents and civil registration: In 2024, the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities in Kosovo continue to face significant challenges with civil registration and obtaining essential documents 46. As assessed by the respondents, around 560 Roma in various municipalities lack IDs or face difficulties acquiring them, particularly returnee families from North Macedonia who struggle with lost or destroyed documents. The administrative process is complicated, and many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian community members face language barriers, legal ignorance, and discrimination when seeking help. A new rule requiring a registered address to obtain an ID card further exacerbates the situation, as many members of these communities lack a permanent address. These issues hinder their access to basic rights, employment, education, and healthcare, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reforms.

Gee the Annual Kosovo
Ombudsperson report at:https://
oik-rks.org/en/2025/03/28/
the-ombudsperson-submittedthe-annual-report-for-2024-tothe-assembly-of-the-republic-ofkosovo/

47 See for example a recent incident of this kind widely reported by Kosovo media, and notably condemned by major societal actors: https://kossev.info/en/u-obilicu-napadnut-15-godisnji-fudbaler-za-vreme-utakmice-uhapsen-osumnjiceni-napadac/

Housing situation: In 2024, the housing situation for many Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian community members remains challenging. While there are some social programs aimed at providing apartments for vulnerable families, including Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, such initiatives are not widespread across all municipalities. Despite previous efforts, like the social housing strategy developed during earlier government terms, improvements on the ground have been limited. Many Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians still live in poor conditions, often in segregated and informal settlements lacking basic infrastructure like drinking water, sewage, and legal housing. Additionally, many families reside on publically-owned land or land with unclear property ownership, further complicating their housing situation.

Property- or security-related concerns: Property-related concerns for the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities in 2024 include issues with ownership documentation. As reported by respondents, many own properties but lack the proper documentation to prove ownership, with old contracts often being invalid, which creates significant challenges. Regarding security, the overall situation is generally calm. The most notable security concerns for the community result from periodic bias-motivated incidents, such as attacks on youth from the communities ⁴⁷.

Dinar abolition and closure of Serbian institutions in Kosovo:

The abolition of the Dinar and closure of Serbian institutions has severely impacted around 5,000 people in areas like Obiliq/ Obilić, Gračanica/Graçanicë, Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje, and Lipjan/Lipljan who rely on Serbian social assistance, pensions, and salaries. Vulnerable groups, such as single mothers and people with disabilities, face increased difficulty accessing these benefits, particularly as the new system makes it harder for them to travel to Serbian towns adjacent to Kosovo areas to withdraw money. This has worsened their already difficult living conditions.

Political Representation and Advocacy: Respondents noted that political representatives face significant challenges in advocating for the rights of these communities. There is a general lack of effective representation, with some politicians unable to fully represent community interests due to political pressures and limited support. Although some do attempt to advocate for their communities, their influence is often constrained, and minority communities have limited access to decision-makers.

Recommendations

- The Government of Kosovo should enhance budgeting and efforts for the implementation of the National Strategy on Kosovo Roma and Ashkali in all of its aspects, as well as develop more long-term, institutionally supported socio-economic programs.
- The donor community should broaden its support to the socio-economic support and integration of these communities, in particular to develop more tailor-made funding through consultation with the civil society.
- The Kosovo central institutions should fully implement the 10% minority employment quota in public institutions and ensure effective monitoring of hiring practices.
- Central and municipal institutions should have more targeted policies and budgets to improve infrastructure in Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian areas ensuring access to clean water, sewage systems, and adequate housing.
- The Kosovo central authorities should streamline and tailor-make civil registration procedures to reduce administrative barriers to obtaining identification documents.
- The Kosovo central institutions, international organizations and donors, and civil society should strengthen awareness campaigns on anti-discrimination laws and create accessible reporting mechanisms to encourage affected individuals to seek justice.

Bosniak Community 48

48 Previous assessments of community issues is available from the report on the "Assessment of the Status of Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo: the Roadmap for the Improvement of Rights of Non-Majority Communities," by AKTIV: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mapa-puta-za-unapredjenje-prava-nevecinskihzajednica-ENG-1.pdf

Language and Education: Efforts to improve education in the Bosnian language have seen notable progress. The Balkanistics program, established at the University of Pristina in 2021, has continued to exist, offering courses in official languages, including Bosnian. This initiative has been notable in promoting multilingualism and fostering social cohesion among diverse communities in Kosovo. Additionally, the Language Center associated with the program provides language education, certification, and translation services, further supporting the linguistic needs of the Bosniak community. However, challenges persist in ensuring the consistent availability of textbooks and expanding course offerings at secondary and tertiary levels in Bosniak-majority areas. Some schools that offer education in Bosnian lack adequate staff and in some cases facilities for this purpose. Parents of children attending the Bosnian language program at the main high school of Pristina have in recent years voiced their concern in this regard. Addressing these issues remains crucial for empowering the Bosniak community through education

Access to Services in the Bosnian Language: Despite ongoing initiatives, significant obstacles remain in accessing services and information in the Bosnian language. Structural issues related to the enforcement of multilingual regulations continue to impede the community's ability to receive adequate services. Similarly to Serbian, the provision of services in Bosnian (or Serbian, which is similar to Bosnian and can be used for interaction with Bosniaks) is inconsistent and often depends on random factors (such as some staff happen to speak it) rather than on systemic solutions. Notably, the lack of consecutive or simultaneous translation into Bosnian during judicial proceedings is a particular concern.

Political Representation: Respondents believe that political parties representing the Bosniak community should coultivate a more unified approach. This involves identifying and prioritizing core issues for collective advocacy at both local and central government levels. Such unity is vital for effectively addressing the community's needs and ensuring their interests are represented in policy-making processes. With respect to representation, notable was the fact that the government led by PM Albin Kurti (formed in 2021) featured a Kosovo Bosniak politician (Emilija Redžepi) at the level of deputy prime minister, the highest ever rank for any representative from non-majority communities other than Kosovo Serbs.

49 The VocUp language learning platform in Kosovo was initiated by the Center for Social Initiatives (CSI), a non-governmental organization based in North Mitrovica. The program was developed with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and the British Embassy in Pristina

Economic Development and Infrastructure: Enhancing economic opportunities and improving infrastructure in areas predominantly inhabited by Bosniaks are crucial factors of their sustainability in Kosovo. Investments in road infrastructure are particularly important to facilitate mobility and economic activities. The Kosovo Reform Agenda acknowledges that inadequate infrastructure poses challenges to economic development, underscoring the need for targeted investments to transform these challenges into growth opportunities.

Community Engagement and Social Cohesion: Initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion through language learning have been impactful. Programs like VocUp ⁴⁹, an online platform for learning Albanian and Serbian, have bridged linguistic divides and promoted mutual understanding among different communities in Kosovo. Such efforts are essential in building trust and facilitating interethnic dialogue.

Recommendations

- Provision of Serbian- and Bosnian-language services by Kosovo institutions should be more systemic and based on a concrete administrative policy, rather than ad hoc. Recommendations of the Kosovo Language Commissioner should be adhered more strictly.
- The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation should expand Bosnian-language education programs and provide textbooks for all levels of schooling, as well as provide additional support to enhance the presence of qualified teaching staff and appropriateness of teaching facilities.
- The Kosovo central and municipal authorities should increase investment in road infrastructure in Bosniak-majority areas and develop targeted economic programs for Bosniak entrepreneurs, farmers, and youth.

Turkish Community 50

- 5º Previous assessments of community issues is available from the report on the "Assessment of the Status of Rights of Non-Majority Communities in Kosovo: the Roadmap for the Improvement of Rights of Non-Majority Communities," by AKTIV: https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mapa-puta-za-unapredjenje-prava-nevecinskihzajednica-ENG-1.pdf
- 5¹ See for example this media report: https://kosovapress.com/ en/eng/the-students-of-the-turkishcommunity-have-not-yet-receivedall-the-textbooks-compiledaccording-to-the-new-curriculum.
- ⁵² See more at: https://tika.gov. tr/en/tikas-support-for-turkisheducation-in-kosovo/

Language Access: The accessibility of official materials in the Turkish language remains a concern in municipalities where the Turkish community represents a significant portion of the population. Turkish language is in official use in Prizren and Mamusa municipalities, and in limited official use in Gjilan/Gnjilane, whereas municipal authorities in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North and Lipjan/Lipljan have recently initiated a process that could lead to the recognition of some form of formal standing for the language. However, gaps persist in the availability of interpreters and timely translations of official documents. Public information and services in Turkish languages as prescribed by law need to be provided more consistently.

Education and Learning Materials: The shortage of Turkish-language textbooks in both primary and secondary schools remains a key issue ⁵¹. While efforts have been made to strengthen collaboration with educational institutions in Türkiye, these initiatives have yet to fully meet the demand for quality learning materials. In 2024, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) completed the renovation of the Turkish Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Philology, Hasan Prishtina University (of Pristina), improving higher education facilities for Turkish-speaking students. However, further investment is necessary to provide comprehensive educational resources at all levels. ⁵²

Employment and Economic Inclusion: Youth unemployment within the Turkish community continues to be a challenge, contributing to outward migration. Ensuring equitable access to these opportunities for the Turkish community requires targeted employment policies. The Kosovo-Türkiye Economic Forum held in 2024 fostered bilateral business cooperation, creating new prospects for economic integration and job creation. Sustainable employment initiatives remain a priority for addressing economic disparities within the community.

Cultural Promotion and Community Engagement: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations from the Turkish community play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Turkish language, culture, and identity. In 2024, the regular calls, such as by the Office for Community Affairs, have continued, in support to these organizations to enhance their engagement through cultural and educational initiatives. Accessing grants from local, central, and international sources is essential for expanding the reach and impact of these activities across Kosovo. Increased visibility of Turkish heritage can foster greater social cohesion and recognition within the broader Kosovo society.

Recommendations:

- The Government of Kosovo and relevant municipal authorities should ensure the consistent usage of Turkish language in municipalities where it is in official use.
- The Government of Kosovo should ensure enhanced funding for interpretation services for Turkish language, so as to hire more interpreters and translators for public institutions. The multilingual policy in Kosovo should be applied more consistently and systematically. Quotas for Turkish speakers should be established in key central and local institutions where the community lives and obtains services.
- The Government of Kosovo should expand funding for Turkish-language textbooks, in partnership with Türkiye's Ministry of Education and organizations like TİKA to provide high-quality learning materials at all levels.
- The Government of Kosovo should expand on teacher training for all non-majority communities and create scholarship and training programs for educators to improve teaching standards.
- The Government of Kosovo should develop targeted employment programs for the Turkish community, including the establishment of internships, apprenticeships, and job training for Turkish-speaking youth in priority sectors. Incentives could also be offered to businesses that employ youth from the community Business grants and microfinance opportunities should also be expanded.
- The Government of Kosovo and the donor community should support Turkish cultural centers, NGOs, and media initiatives to preserve heritage and language, as well as promote inter-community initiatives, such as multicultural festivals, language exchange programs, and media campaigns to enhance social cohesion.
- Kosovo's central institutions should introduce stricter penalties for online hate speech, including that targeting ethnic communities, and enhance digital monitoring through a dedicated cyber-monitoring unit within law enforcement. Work with social media platforms should also be enhanced to remove hate speech content and promote fact-checking of information.
- TİKA and other donors should prioritize support to the above-listed enhancements, in particular in terms of language, textbooks, and economic opportunities.

