Difficult Questions Ahead

EDUCATION SYSTEM OF KOSOVO SERBS

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Foreword

Difficult Questions Ahead is a CASA research initiative, supported by the Open Society Foundation–Western Balkans, designed to open evidence-based discussion on some of the most sensitive and politically contested issues affecting relations between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. Rather than avoiding questions on which positions appear deeply divided, the initiative seeks to examine them directly, understand how they are perceived within both communities, and explore whether space exists for approaches that can accommodate their different concerns and interests.

This edition focuses on the education system of Kosovo Serbs and the growing debate over its future institutional status within Kosovo. The issue has increasingly entered political and public debate, yet discussion remains shaped by fundamentally different political and institutional perspectives. The objective of this research is therefore not to advocate for a predetermined model or outcome, but to provide an evidence-based foundation for a more informed debate and to examine whether, despite different starting positions, principles can be identified that could provide common ground for addressing the issue.

The education system is not simply a question of schools, curricula, or institutional arrangements. For Kosovo Serbs, it is closely connected to community continuity, identity, links with Serbia, and confidence in the future. From the Kosovo Albanian perspective, the same system raises questions of institutional authority, legality, and the existence of structures operating outside Kosovo institutions. Education is particularly sensitive because decisions ultimately concern children and their future. Any solution will therefore depend not only on agreements between political actors but also on whether parents believe that it serves the interests and prospects of their children. Their choices may have consequences reaching well beyond education, including decisions about whether to remain in Kosovo.

This makes the future of the education system an issue of existential importance for the Kosovo Serb community. This paper should therefore also be understood as an invitation to a serious public debate, one that moves beyond political agendas and competing institutional claims and puts people, their choices, and their future at its center.

The value of the Difficult Questions The ahead initiative lies precisely in recognizing that difficult questions cannot be addressed by insisting on a single interpretation of the problem. Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians approach the future of the education system from very different starting points, and these differences need to be acknowledged rather than artificially reconciled. Yet different perspectives do not necessarily mean that common ground is impossible. Alongside the two sets of recommendations reflecting each perspective, the initiative will therefore develop harmonized recommendations identifying principles that can be supported from both sides. The intention is not to manufacture consensus or prescribe a final solution, but to establish a minimum common ground from which a more constructive discussion can begin.

The ambition is not to offer ready-made solutions but to inform decision makers about the interests, concerns, expectations, and boundaries that any sustainable approach to this issue will need to take into account. Ultimately, this paper is an attempt to bring evidence, public perspectives, and the interests of affected communities into a debate too often dominated by politics.

Kosovo Albanian Perspectives on the Integration of Serbian-Language Education

Ramadan Ilazi

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a survey of 500 Kosovo Albanian respondents conducted in April 2026 as part of the CASA comparative research project on the integration of Serbian-language education into Kosovo's state system.

Two parallel education systems have operated in Kosovo since 1999. One is run by Kosovo's Ministry of Education of Kosovo and the other by Serbia's government, which funds and governs estimated 17,456 pupils across 69 primary and 34 secondary schools in across Kosovo. [1] At the tertiary level, the university in the north of Kosovo operates outside Kosovo's accreditation framework entirely. Prime Minister of Kosovo Mr. Albin Kurti committed publicly to integrating these structures, stating arguing for a "necessity of starting the gradual integration of the health and education system" as well as noting that "This integration process will take place in coordination with the European Union, while ensuring that the concerns and advice of the non-majority Serbian population in Kosovo are taken into account,"[2]

The survey shows that Kosovo Albanian respondents do not see Serbian-language education as just a majority-versus-minority issue. Instead, most agree that Serbian pupils and students should learn in their mother tongue, but only if it happens within Kosovo's legal and regulatory system. This is the main finding of the report. Most Kosovo Albanian respondents are also open to using textbooks from Serbia only if there are limits or if Kosovo institutions approve them first. Most also believe that all universities in Kosovo should meet Kosovo's accreditation and quality standards. Teachers and professors from Serbia are accepted by most respondents only if they have work permits and their qualifications are recognized.

The survey does not show a broadly alarmist public view that the current segregation of education systems as an immediate crisis. However, when asked to think about the medium term, respondents point to several risks such as more segregation, weaker societal ties, deeper historical divisions which can lead to revisionism, and long-term political instability. So, while the current setup is not seen as an urgent emergency, it is viewed as costly and unsustainable if it continues for too long. Only a minority say they know that Kosovo law regulates accreditation, curriculum approval and work permits in this field. An even larger share is unsure whether public discussion on the topic is based on accurate information

[1] European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo (ECMI Kosovo), *Education in the Serbian Language in Kosovo* (Prishtina: ECMI Kosovo, November 2018), 18–19, https://www.ecmikosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Education-in-Serbian-Language-_ENG.pdf

[2] KoSSev, "Kurti Announced the 'Gradual Integration' of Serbian Healthcare and Education, a Day after the Actual Postponement of the Implementation of Two Laws," January 16, 2026, https://kossev.info/en/kurti-najavio-postepenu-integraciju-srpskog-zdravstva-i-skolstva-dan-nakon-faktickog-odlaganja-primene-dva-zakona/.

The survey's main findings are:

- 52% of respondents take a neutral position on whether educational separation affects inter-ethnic relations. A further 36.6% see a net negative effect; only 11% see a positive one.
- 60.4% describe themselves as poorly or not at all informed about what is taught in Serbian-language schools.
- 41% are neutral on integration; 34% support it; 25% oppose it.
- 57.4% favour full integration under the Kosovo curriculum as their preferred model. A further 21.2% favour a hybrid model with Kosovo oversight.
- 88.8% agree that Serb pupils should have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. Of these, 79.6% specify this right should operate under the Kosovo curriculum.
- 56.6% say full adoption of Kosovo's curriculum and laws by Serbian-language schools would be the main condition for increasing their support for integration.
- 73.2% were either unaware or unsure that Kosovo legislation already governs accreditation and curriculum approval for all educational institutions on its territory.
- 61.4% are unsure whether public debate about Serbian-language schools rests on accurate information about Kosovo's legal framework.

The review of policy and legislation shows that Kosovo's laws already protect education in community languages, including Serbian. There are also rules for reviewing curricula, approving textbooks, municipal roles, accreditation, and quality assurance in higher education. The main issue is not the legal basis, but rather that implementation is fragmented, the public does not fully understand the system, and the topic is often seen through the lens of sovereignty and Serbia-backed parallel structures.

The overarching picture is a Kosovo Albanian public that accepts Serbian-language schools, insists on Kosovo institutional authority over education on its territory, and is forming its views with limited access to basic facts about the existing legal framework.

Introduction and Contextual Background

Since 1999, two entirely separate systems of schooling have operated in Kosovo. One governed by Kosovo's Ministry of Education and operating within Kosovo's constitutional and legal framework, the other funded, staffed, and curricularly directed by the government of Serbia, functioning in practical independence from Kosovo's institutions. Approximately 17,456 pupils are enrolled in 69 primary and 34 secondary Serbian-language schools across Kosovo, governed by Belgrade. At the tertiary level, the a university in Mitrovica North operates entirely outside Kosovo's accreditation framework. These are active, functioning institutions, and they constitute the most visible remaining dimension of the parallel structures that have defined post-war Kosovo.

This division was not the product of a formal agreement or a negotiated arrangement. It emerged from the circumstances of the post-war settlement, in which Serbia retained a degree of governmental reach into Kosovo's Serb-majority communities and municipalities, particularly in the north. The parallel education system was one expression of a broader pattern of parallel institutions, that have covered health, security, finance, and public administration and that Belgrade maintained as instruments of political presence. For Kosovo Serbs, these structures represented continuity, security, and identity. For Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo's government, they represented a challenge to the state's territorial integrity and institutional authority.

What is striking, is the completeness of the separation. According to research conducted by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) Kosovo, the two education systems have coexisted since 1999 with no formal cooperation or dialogue at any institutional level. No shared curriculum frameworks. No joint teacher training. No coordinated school calendars or standardised quality assurance. In at least nine municipalities across Kosovo, schools operating under Kosovo's curriculum and schools operating under Serbia's curriculum share the same physical premises but function as strangers to one another, with no interaction between students and no formal relationship between administrations. In some of these shared buildings, the two communities have occupied the same physical space for more than two decades without having developed a common institutional language or a shared understanding of the educational enterprise.

Prime Minister Albin Kurti announced publicly that his government intends to incorporate Serbian-run education and health institutions into Kosovo's system, framing integration as a process to be pursued cooperatively with the EU. The European Union (EU) has called for integration to proceed through dialogue and in coordination with Kosovo Serbs.[3] The Serbian List, the dominant Kosovo Serb political party, has insisted the matter belongs exclusively to the EU-facilitated normalisation dialogue. It is in this context that this report presents original survey findings from the Kosovo Albanian population. The NGO CASA research project commissioned a survey of 500 Kosovo Albanian respondents, conducted in April 2026, designed to map public opinion on the integration of Serbian-language education into Kosovo's institutional system with a level of specificity that has not previously been attempted. The survey covers the full range of practical questions: the preferred model for integration, the appropriate role for Serbian-language curricula and textbooks, the conditions under which teachers from Serbia should be permitted to work in Kosovo, the status and accreditation standards that should apply to the university in the north, and the role, if any, that international partners should play in the process.

[3] Read more at https://balkaninsight.com/2026/04/06/kosovo-wants-to-integrate-serbian-run-institutions-but-serbs-are-resisting/bi/

The results challenge several assumptions that have shaped both the political debate and existing research on the subject. Kosovo Albanian opinion is not, as is sometimes assumed, reflexively hostile to Serbian-language schooling. An overwhelming majority — 88.8 percent — accept that Serbian pupils have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. A clear majority — 64 percent — support allowing teachers from Serbia to work in Kosovo, provided they hold valid work permits and recognised qualifications. A further 58 percent accept the use of Serbian-produced textbooks in some form. What the Kosovo Albanian public resists is not Serbian-language education as such, but the institutional arrangement through which that education is currently delivered — namely, schools and universities that operate outside Kosovo's legal and regulatory framework, funded and directed by a foreign state, with no formal relationship to Kosovo's Ministry of Education, its accreditation bodies, or its curriculum authorities.

This distinction has direct implications for how an integration process might be designed, sequenced, and communicated. When the specific conditions for integration are mapped against Kosovo's existing legal framework, a striking degree of alignment emerges. Kosovo's Constitution guarantees communities the right to receive education in their own language. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members explicitly protects education and training in community languages. The Law on Pre-University Education requires accreditation of all schools operating on Kosovo's territory, irrespective of language of instruction, but explicitly permits the use of Serbian-developed curricula and textbooks, subject to notification to and approval by the Ministry of Education. The Law on Local Self-Government grants Serb-majority municipalities, including Mitrovica North, the authority to register educational institutions and establish universities. The legal infrastructure for an integration process that preserves Serbian-language education while bringing it within Kosovo's institutional framework already exists. What is missing is political will, an a carefully developed implementation plan in full coordination with the Kosovo Serbs and the international community, alongside a coherent communication strategy.

A major concern for Kosovo government, civil society and international community should be that the survey shows that 73.2 percent of respondents were either unaware or uncertain that Kosovo legislation already governs accreditation and curriculum approval for all educational institutions operating on its territory. 60.4 percent describe themselves as poorly or not at all informed about what is actually taught in Serbian-language schools. 61.4 percent cannot assess whether public debate on the topic is based on accurate information. These are not marginal figures. They represent the dominant epistemic condition of the surveyed population on a consequential policy question facing Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo's government. They indicate that Kosovo Albanian public opinion on integration is, to a significant degree, unformed — not because respondents are disengaged, but because the basic informational foundations for an informed view are absent.

This report documents that gap and its implications. It proceeds from a close reading of the survey data across seventeen questions, organised thematically: inter-ethnic relations and awareness; views on integration and risk; language rights and curriculum; textbooks, teachers, and universities; the information environment; conditions for support; and the long-term risks of the status quo. At each stage, the empirical findings are read against the relevant legal and institutional context, drawing on Kosovo's legislative framework, published civil society research, and the specific commitments made in the 2013 Brussels Agreement and the 2023 APN (Agreement on the Path to Normalization).

The overall picture that emerges is of a Kosovo Albanian public that is more open to a principled integration process. The survey does not reveal a public demanding the dissolution of Serbian schools or the removal of Serbian teachers. It reveals a public that accepts Serbian-language education, insists on Kosovo institutional authority, and is waiting — largely in the dark — for a credible account of what

integration would actually mean, what it would not mean, and what legal framework already exists to guide it.

The report concludes with recommendations directed at the Kosovo government, civil society and research organisations, and international partners. These recommendations follow directly from the data, and they are not designed to override the complex political dynamics of the integration process but to address the informational and communicational deficits that the survey has identified, and which any sustainable integration framework will need to resolve.

When it comes to the education sector in Kosovo, what we have are two systems, with practical zero contact. According to an ECMI report, the two education systems in Kosovo have been coexisting separately since 1999, with no cooperation or dialogue between them at any level.[4] A Kosovo OSCE report also confirms this, noting that no formal cooperation exists between Kosovo curriculum and Serbian curriculum schools, even in municipalities where they share the same building.[5] In other words, these are not systems that tried to connect and failed, but they never tried, and this is a political choice dressed up as a logistical reality. Furthermore, the Serbian education system in Kosovo is also not homogenous as widely perceived but deeply fragmented, and there is a real north-south divide. Schools in the four municipalities in the north of Kosovo have substantially better working conditions and equipment than Serbian-language schools elsewhere in Kosovo.[6]

At least in nine municipalities Kosovo curriculum and Serbian curriculum schools share the same physical premises.[7] What happens inside those shared spaces? There are no systematic institutional initiatives promoting interaction between the students. Whatever contact happens is occasional, funded by civil society organizations, and not embedded in any school policy. In some of these shared schools, tensions between students have been flagged as a concern. One can imagine, that in some of these cases the building is being shared for more than two decades and people in them are often strangers to each other.

Something that affects both communities equally, and that almost nobody is talking about, is depopulation. Albanian-speaking and Serbian-speaking schools alike are losing students. In 2025, primary and lower secondary schools registered around six thousand fewer students, and upper secondary schools saw a drop of roughly five thousand.[8] Similar trends are visible in the Kosovo Serb community. While politicians remain focused on the usual flashpoints, the schools are quietly emptying out, and this is a problem that no agreement in Brussels is designed to fix.

Kosovo's Constitution guarantees communities the right to receive public education in one of the official languages of their choice at all levels, and to receive pre-school, primary, and secondary education in their own language. Serbian is one of Kosovo's two official languages under the Law on the Use of Languages.

> *Members of communities shall have the right, individually or in community, to: … "receive public education in one of the official languages of Kosovo of their choice at all levels"*
>
> *Article 59 (2) [Rights of Communities and their Members]*

[4] ECMI Kosovo, 2018

[5] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission in Kosovo, Communities Access to Pre-University Education in Kosovo (December 2018).

[6] ECMI Report, 2018

[7] ECMI Report, 2018

[8] Telegrafi, "Në Kosovë bie numri i përgjithshëm i nxënësve dhe studentëve," July 3, 2025, https://telegrafi.com/ne-kosove-bie-numri-pergjithshem-nxenesve-dhe-studenteve

The law No. 03/L-047 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members in Kosovo, adopted in March of 2008 is a foundational legal act protecting ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic rights of non-majority communities in Kosovo.[9] It protects education and training in community languages, ensures equal access to higher education for community members, and allows communities to set up and run private schools if they meet Kosovo's standards, licensing, and accreditation rules. The Law on Pre-University Education (Law No. 04/L-032) requires the respective Ministry of Education to accredit all educational institutions operating in Kosovo, regardless of the language of used.[10] Schools may use externally produced curricula (including from Serbia), however this is subject to approval by the respective Ministry of Education of Kosovo. The Law on Higher Education (Law No. 04/L-037) imposes the same accreditation requirement on universities.[11]

The legal framework in Kosovo, thus already provides for Serbian-language education and for the use of Serbian-source curricula provided it is approved by the Ministry of Education. What it does not provide for is an education system operating entirely outside Kosovo's institutional authority.

The Ahtisaari Proposal, which underpinned Kosovo's independence and statehood, granted Serb-majority municipalities expanded competences in secondary healthcare and higher education, including the authority to register and license educational institutions, hire staff, and set salaries. North Mitrovica, Gračanica, and Štrpce hold these powers, but they have not been used for the purpose of facilitating an integration process for the education sector. For instance, the law 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government in article 21 states that: "The municipality of Mitrovicë/ Mitrovica North shall have competence for the provision of higher education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators". In other words, if Municipality of Mitrovica North wants to, it can initiate the necessary steps today to establish a university or legalize/legitimize the existing "University of Priština in North Mitrovica (UPKM)".[12]

As a result of this situation, graduates from the UPKM face uncertain diploma recognition, and while they are fully valid in Serbia, are treated on case-by-case bases in Kosovo, and have variable status in third countries.[13] Kosovo's has established a diploma verification commission, which had processed over 700 degrees from the North Mitrovica institution by March 2026.[14] Former Deputy Education Minister Dukagjin Pupovci has stated that "Kosovo's legislation provides enough space for integration while

[9] Kosovo, Law No. 03/L-047, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2531&langid=2.

[10] Kosovo, Law on Pre-University Education, Law No. 04/L-032, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2770&langid=2

[11] Kosovo, Law on Higher Education, Law No. 04/L-037.

[12] Kosovo, *Law on Local Self-Government*, Law No. 03/L-040, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Law-On-Local-Self-Government.pdf.

[13] Ardita Zeqiri and Xhorxhina Bami "Kosovo Wants to Integrate Serbian-Run Institutions – But Serbs are Resisting" ,BIRN, April 6, 2026, https://balkaninsight.com/2026/04/06/kosovo-wants-to-integrate-serbian-run-institutions-but-serbs-are-resisting/bi/

[14] KOHA.net, 20 March 2026: the Commission for Verification of Diplomas had verified over 700 diplomas issued by the University of North Mitrovica as of March 2026.

preserving school identity,"[15] but this requires political cooperation that the Serbian List has so far withheld.

The integration of the education sector therefore sits within the EU-mediated Kosovo-Serbia normalization dialogue. The 2013 Brussels Agreement committed Serbia to dissolving what Kosovo perceives as parallel structures operating outside Kosovo's system in Serb-majority municipalities, but especially in the north.[16] The 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalization of Relation includes commitments for self-governance for Kosovo Serbs and the possibility of continued Serbian financial support for the sectors like education.[17] Belgrade insists that education integration in Kosovo must be conditional and implemented through the formation of the Community/Association of Serbian-Majority Municipalities (ASM), which Kosovo government is yet to establish, besides being a legal obligation. The EU's position is that integration must be done "in close coordination with the Kosovo Serb community and their representatives"[18], which leaves the situation with the education sector unresolved. In practice, the Kosovo government has decoupled education integration from the ASM question, moving forward on closure of the parallel structures or Serbian public institutions operating in Kosovo, while not acknowledging the commitment to ASM. This has produced friction with Brussels.[19] However, the Kosovo government has not made any moves on forcing integration of the education in Serbian-majority municipalities, as this is widely seen as something of a red-line drawn for Kosovo by the international community, and as such it cannot be crossed without full consultation and coordination with them.

Within the Kosovo Assembly, the Education Committee has debated whether its oversight mandate explicitly covers the University in Mitrovica North and Serbian-language primary schools. The Serbian List has challenged the committee's jurisdiction over parallel structures, arguing the issue is a matter for the normalization dialogue.

In other words, the legal framework in Kosovo is in place to facilitate integration process of the education sector in Serb-majority municipalities, but what is missing is the will and political conditions to start this. Kosovo's legislation, built on the Ahtisaari Plan, already gives Serbian-majority municipalities wide educational rights. They can use Serbian-developed textbooks and curricula, simply by notifying the Ministry of Education, run their own schools, and even establish universities. However, these legal tools have not been used so far. So, the gap is not in legal or policy framework but in the political will. not a single school has filed that notification. The ECMI report adds that an independent commission recommended creating a new Serbian-language curriculum back in 2010, and it was never implemented

[15] Dukagjin Pupovci, Director of Kosovo Education Centre and former Deputy Minister of Education, quoted in Prishtina Insight, 7 April 2026, https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-wants-to-integrate-serbian-run-institutions-but-faces-resistance-mag/

[16] "First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina (Brussels Agreement)," April 19, 2013, Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/First-agreement-of-principles-governing-the-normalization-of-relations-April-19-2013-Brussels-en.pdf.

[17] European External Action Service, "Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia," February 27, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en.

[18] Read more at: https://balkaninsight.com/2026/04/06/kosovo-wants-to-integrate-serbian-run-institutions-but-serbs-are-resisting/bi/

[19] Emerging Europe, The closure of Kosovo's parallel institutions and its ramifications, September 2024.

because the Serbian curriculum institutions refused to engage.[20] Integration requires two sides to show up, and so far, neither has.

One concrete area where the integration of Serbian-language education into Kosovo's institutional framework has produced tangible, if incomplete, results is diploma recognition.[21] Kosovo and Serbia reached an Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of University Diplomas back in 2011, with the stated aim of ensuring students' access to education programs and employment opportunities throughout the region. The agreement went through several iterations, such as the 2016 expansion that extended the scope beyond university degrees to cover all levels of education, including elementary, secondary, and vocational diplomas. On paper, this is exactly the kind of framework that education integration requires, like a mechanism that allows credentials earned within the Serbian education system to be recognized and used within Kosovo's institutional and labor market structure.

The problem is that it has barely worked in practice. Despite all arrangements, the recognition of diplomas has not fully materialized. Serbia's Constitutional Court struck down the original agreement in 2014, and subsequent renewals, including one as recently as the 2020 Washington economic normalization agreement, have produced commitments without implementation. The one partial exception that needs to be recognized is that Kosovo government adopted in 2015 a regulation for the temporary recognition of diplomas from the University of North Mitrovica, and by the time the verification commission became operational, 1,629 out of 1,703 submitted applications were recognized which means that, for the first time since 1999, Kosovo Serb graduates could seek public employment in Kosovo.[22] This example shows what integration can actually look like when political will exists, even minimally. Scaling that logic to the entire pre-university education sector is precisely what a serious integration framework would need to do — and the legal basis for it, at least on Kosovo's side, already exists.

A common misconception worth addressing is what integration actually means in practice. For many people, the word triggers an immediate fear — that Kosovo Serbian schools would simply be absorbed into the Kosovo Albanian system and cease to exist as a distinct educational space. That is not what integration means. Integration means Serbian schools operating within Kosovo's legal and institutional framework: recognized by the state, transparently funded, and accountable to the same standards that apply to everyone else. So, integration does not mean that the Kosovo Serbian school system will disappear, be absorbed or assimilated, it means it has to become legitimate in Kosovo's system.

Why integration matters? There are two separate historical realities in the same country being taught and this is a ticking clock for ethno-political radicalization. When Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbian minors grow up learning completely different versions of history, including geography that places Kosovo inside Serbia, then we are not building a shared society, but deepening a line that creates division. Subjects like math or biology are fine to keep separate. But history and geography need at minimum a conversation, and at most a reconciliation. The ones who gain most from keeping the education systems separate are the political actors, who may need isolation to maintain control of the community.

[20] ECMI Report

[21] Read more at: https://dialogue-info.com/recognition-of-diplomas/

[22] Read more from: https://kossev.info/en/objavljena-procedura-za-verifikaciju-diploma-sa-univerziteta-u-kosovskoj-mitrovici/; https://dialogue-info.com/recognition-of-diplomas/

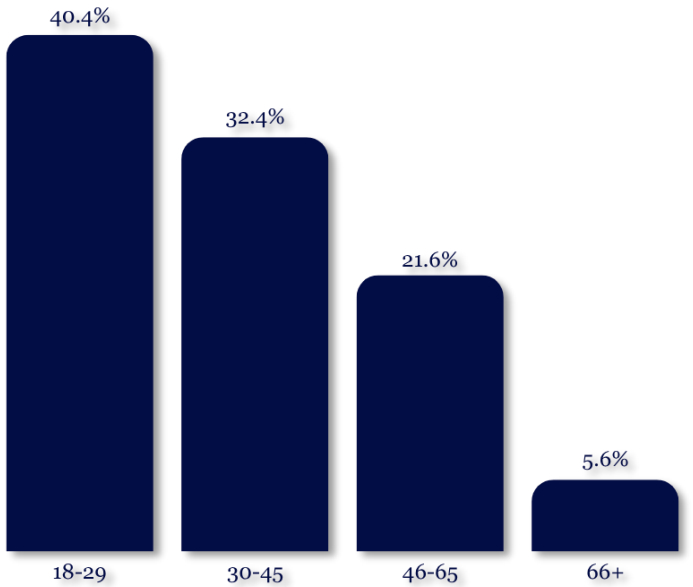
This section presents all 17 survey questions from the Kosovo Albanian sample (n=500, April 2026). Questions are grouped thematically. All percentages refer to the total sample unless noted otherwise.

Sample Profile

Sample by Gender



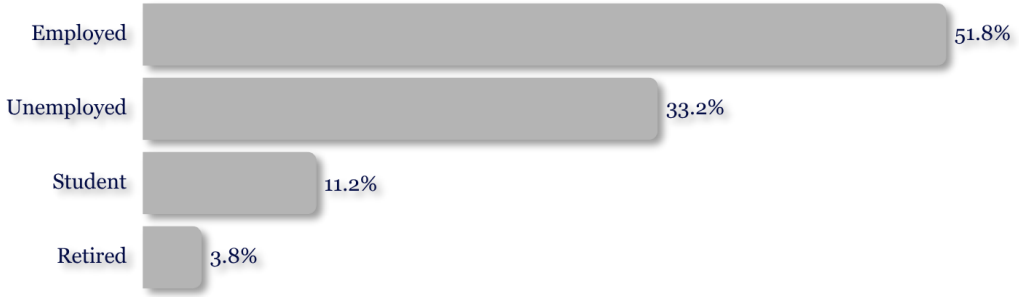
Sample by Age



Sample by Education Level



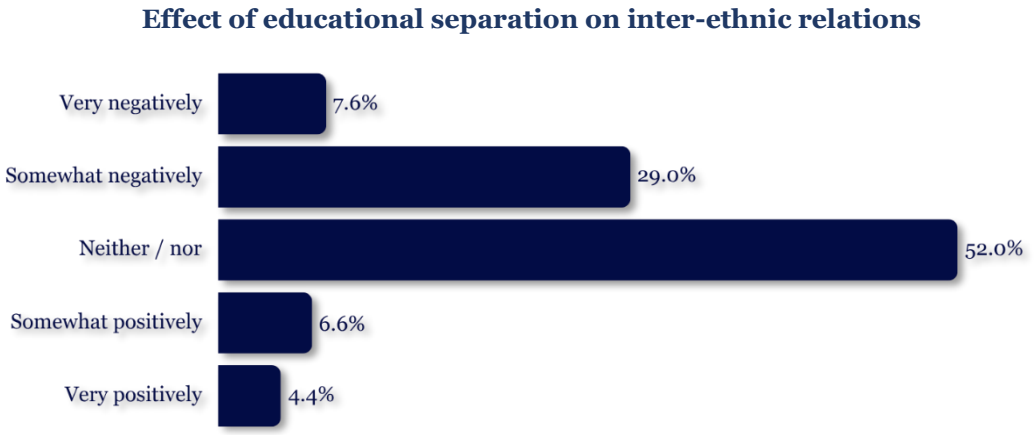
Sample by Employment Status



The gender split is near-equal (51.2% male, 48.8% female). The sample skews young: 40.4% are aged 18–29, and 32.4% are aged 30–45, together 72.8% of respondents — consistent with Kosovo's demographic profile, where the median age is around 30 Education levels are high: 54% have completed higher education, 39.8% secondary, and 6.2% primary only. This likely means the sample overrepresents engaged, policy-aware citizens relative to the general population. 51.8% are employed, 33.2% unemployed — broadly consistent with Kosovo's official unemployment rate of around 25% — 11.2% are students, and 3.8% retired.

Inter-ethnic Relations and Awareness

Public awareness of Kosovo's parallel education system and its social consequences remains both limited and uneven, with significant implications for how integration policy is understood, debated, and ultimately pursued. The survey data presented in this section reveals not only how Kosovo Albanian respondents perceive the effects of educational separation on inter-ethnic relations, but also how poorly informed they are about the content of Serbian-language schooling itself.



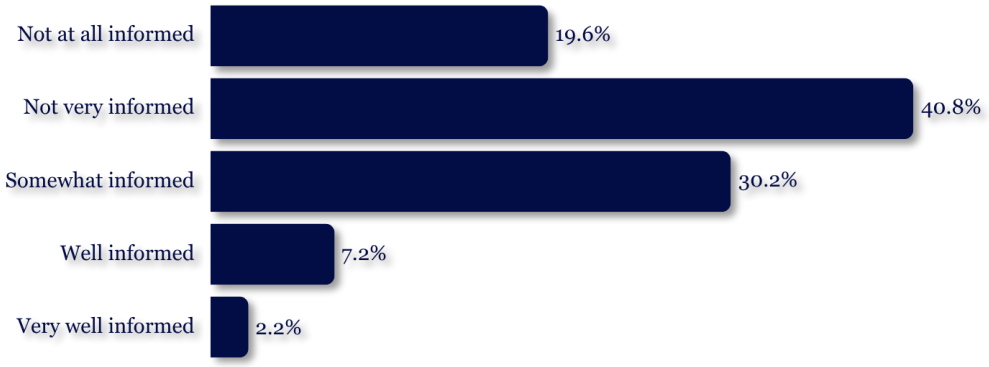
Public perception data among Kosovo Albanians seems to suggests that the educational separation actively damages interethnic relations in Kosovo. 52% say the separation has neither a positive nor negative effect on inter-ethnic relations. The most likely explanation is that most Albanian respondents have limited day-to-day exposure to Serbian-language schools, which are concentrated in specific municipalities. The effect is real but distant. Among those who have a view, the reading is negative: 29% say "somewhat negatively" and 7.6% say "very negatively," for a combined 36.6%. Only 11% see a net positive effect. The 36.6% who see a negative effect are likely among the most receptive to integration arguments framed around social cohesion. Among respondents who held a firm opinion, those identifying negative effects outnumbered those seeing positive ones at roughly a 3:1 ratio — 36.6% versus 11%.

The most politically consequential finding in this data is not the 36.6% who identify harm, but the 52% who say neither positive nor negative. In a society where parallel education systems have existed for decades, this apparent indifference may be better understood as the normalization of separation as respondents cannot evaluate what they have never experienced. As the NGO Aktiv report documents, Kosovo Serb communities, have been educated entirely within Serbian institutional frameworks with virtually no meaningful interface with Kosovo's broader educational system.[23] When separation is all one has ever known, it becomes invisible as a policy choice. This makes the neutral majority not a vote of confidence in the status quo, but rather evidence of how deeply entrenched parallel systems have become. This normalization should itself be treated as a policy problem as one that demands proactive institutional

[23] See the NGO Aktiv report from 2020, https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/KosovoAlbweb.pdf

reform before another generation grows up without the social foundation for genuine inter-ethnic coexistence.

How informed are you about what is taught in Serbian-language schools?

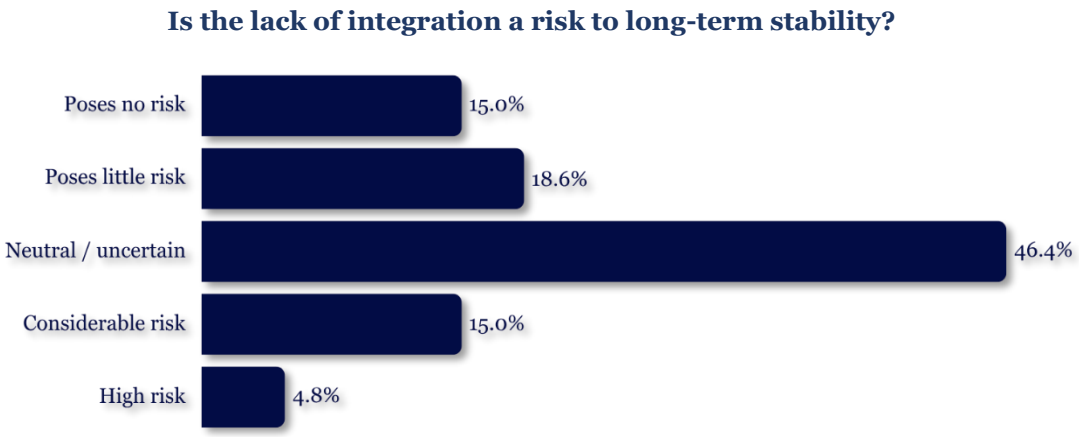


The ignorance of Kosovo Serbian-language education perpetuates the parallel system. The data reveals a striking and deeply consequential knowledge gap with 60.4% of respondents describing themselves as either "not very informed" or "not at all informed" about what is taught in Kosovo Serbian-language schools, while only 9.4% consider themselves well or very well informed. This is a very interesting result for a sample with a high education level, surveyed during a period of active public debate about integration.

The implication for policymakers is that for the Kosovo Albanian respondents are forming views on integration without reliable knowledge of what they are being asked to integrate. Accordingly, the opposition to specific arrangements, such as Serbian textbooks, may rest on assumed worst-cases, while support for integration may be disconnected from practical realities. Other reports, such as from ECMI seem to suggest that even policymakers lack basic data on Kosovo Serbian-language schools and this means that this is a systemic problem, not just a public perception issue.

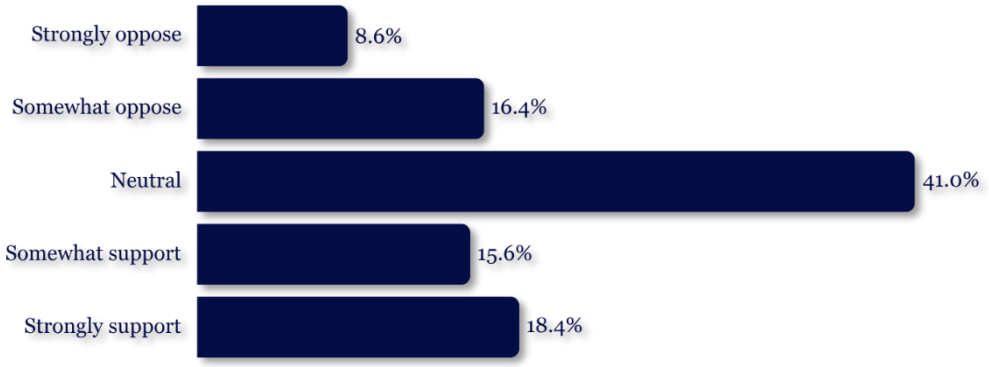
Views on Integration

The survey data on views toward integration reveals a Kosovo Albanian public that is neither firmly opposed nor firmly committed, but largely undecided, because of a specific and addressable reason. The data suggests that the public opinion on this issue has yet to be meaningfully shaped by information, debate, or political leadership. This is both a challenge and an opportunity, as the absence of entrenched opposition means the ground is more open than conventional wisdom might suggest, but the absence of informed engagement also means that without deliberate outreach, the neutral majority is likely to remain passive while the issue goes unresolved.



The risk of the segregated education system in Kosovo is not yet felt among the Kosovo Albanians. When asked whether the lack of educational integration poses a risk to Kosovo's long-term stability, nearly half of the Kosovo Albanian respondents (46.4%) have said they were neutral or uncertain. This might look like a society that is simply not worried. But a closer reading suggests something potentially more concerning, and that is a society that has not yet connected the dots between a divided school system and the kind of long-term instability that tends to arrive slowly and then all at once. Among those who did have a view, the results are also telling (19.8%) identified a considerable or high risk, while 33.6% saw little or no risk. That is not an overwhelming majority dismissing the concern, but it is enough to explain why educational integration has never become a political priority. When the potential consequences feel abstract and distant, the urgency to act simply does not materialise. Uncertainty seems to be the real story from this data, and this should worry policymakers most, because this is not necessarily suggesting we have a population that has weighed the evidence and concluded that everything is fine, but rather a population that genuinely does not know what to think on this particular question, as it does not feel it is informed, as previous data showed.

Support for integration of Serbian-language schools into Kosovo's system

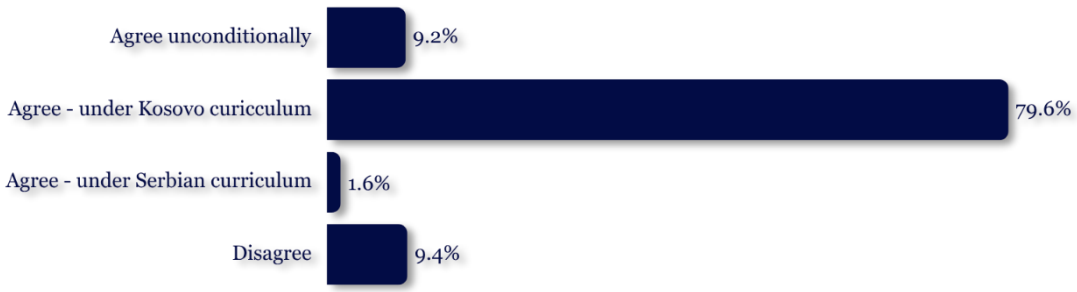


When it comes to actual support for integration of the Kosovo Serbian education sector in the Kosovo system there is clearly more than opposition, but the middle ground still dominates. The finding from the question on support for integration is perhaps one that those in favor of educational integration can welcome the 34% of respondents support for integrating Serbian-language schools into Kosovo's system, compared to only 25% who oppose it. That is an important gap, and it suggests that the instinctive assumption that Kosovo Albanian public opinion is broadly hostile to integrating Serbian schools is not well supported by the data. Support actually outnumbers opposition by roughly 9 percentage points, which in a politically sensitive context like Kosovo is a more workable starting point than many policymakers might expect. That said, the dominant feature of this chart is the 41% who sit in the neutral category, and this is where the most important political opportunity lies. These are not, arguably, individuals perhaps who have considered integration and rejected it but could be individuals who have not yet formed a view, which means they are persuadable. When read alongside the earlier findings, that 60% know very little about Serbian-language schools, and nearly half are uncertain whether the lack of integration poses a stability risk, a more clear picture perhaps emerges. This is a public whose opinion on integration is largely unformed because its understanding of the issue is limited. The 41% neutral bloc is an audience waiting for a credible, well-communicated argument. For policymakers and civil society organisations serious about advancing integration, this data suggests that there is a potential battle for public opinion, and the sooner an awareness raising or information outreach campaign starts the better.

Language Rights and Curriculum

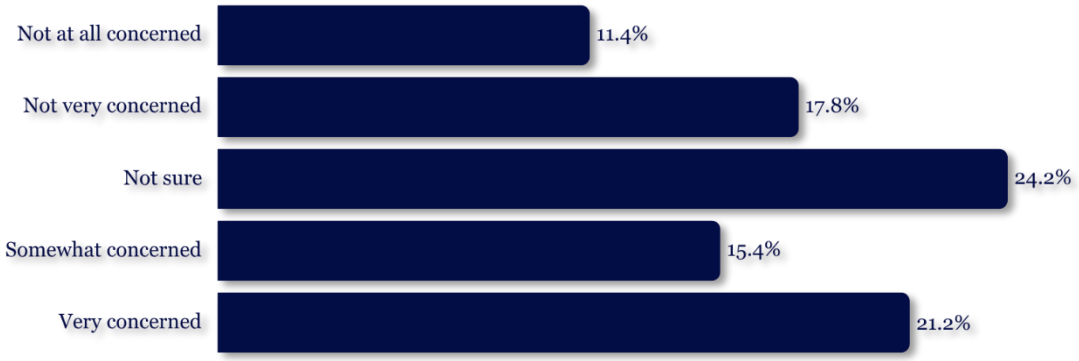
The question of language and curriculum often is part of the debate about Serbian-language education in Kosovo, and the survey data draws a sharp and politically important distinction between the two. As the findings below show, an absolute majority of the Kosovo Albanian public opinion is in support of Kosovo Serbian pupils and students to learn in Serbian language however they are far more nuanced on the issue of curriculum. As already noted, Kosovo's constitutional and legislative framework, drawing on the Ahtisaari Plan, permits Kosovo Serbian schools to use curricula and textbooks developed by Serbia's Ministry of Education, through formal notification to Kosovo's respective Ministry of Education.

Should Serb pupils have the right to be educated in their mother tongue?



The right to mother-tongue education is not in any shape or form a battleground in terms of public opinion. In other words, one of the most clarifying findings in the entire survey is that an overwhelming 88.8% of Kosovo Albanian respondents agree that Serbian pupils should have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. This effectively removes language rights from the debate. The question of whether Kosovo Serbian children deserve education in Serbian is, for the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians, already settled in the affirmative. This is a significant and underappreciated baseline of goodwill that policymakers and civil society advocates have largely failed to build on. If the public conversation about Serbian-language education started from this point of broad agreement rather than from the politically charged question of parallel institutions, the conditions for a more productive dialogue about integration would look considerably more favorable. While the language is not a real dispute, the curriculum, is more challenging. In other words, while 88.8% support mother-tongue education for Serbian pupils, only 1.6% support that education being delivered under a Serbian curriculum, even though this is allowed by the Kosovo legislation, albeit this is an information perhaps majority is not aware of. The remaining 79.6%, which is the dominant response by a wide margin support Serbian-language education specifically under a Kosovo curriculum. This distinction is crucial and tends to get lost in public debate. Kosovo Albanian opinion is not hostile to Serbian-language schooling as such, but hostile to the parallel institutional arrangement through which that schooling is currently delivered. The Serbian curriculum, with its textbooks, its framing of history, and its structural dependence on Belgrade rather than Prishtina, is where the resistance lies. This means that a reform model which preserves Serbian as the language of instruction while bringing schools under Kosovo's curricular framework would align with the views of roughly four in five Kosovo Albanian respondents, a remarkably strong mandate for a specific and actionable integration pathway that has so far received far too little serious political attention.

Concern that Serbian schools promote different historical / geographical narratives

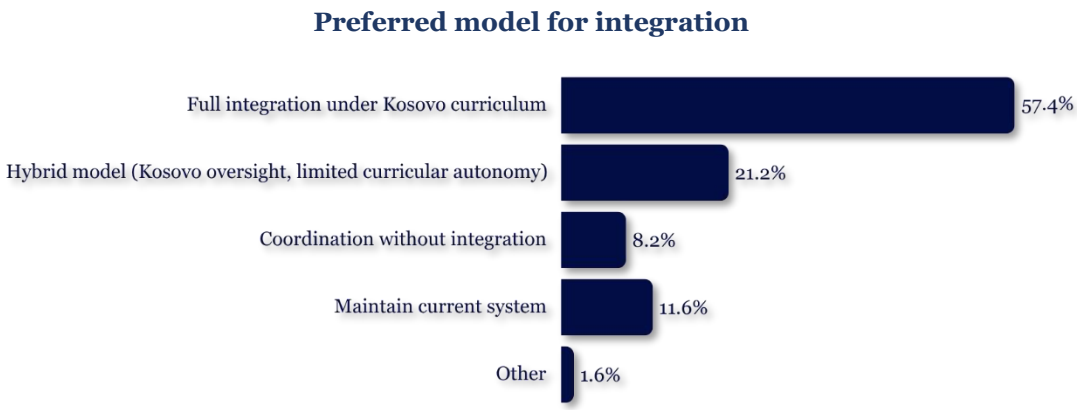


When asked whether Serbian schools promote different historical and geographical narratives, 36.6% of respondents expressed some level of concern — 21.2% very concerned and 15.4% somewhat concerned. This is a notable minority, and their concern is not irrational. Civil society reports have suggested that the question of what Serbian-curriculum schools teach about Kosovo's history has been politically contentious enough to derail textbook exchange agreements and stall curriculum reform for years. These respondents are picking up on a real tension. However, it is equally significant that 29.2% are not very or not at all concerned, and a further 24.2% are not sure. Concern about competing narratives, while present, is far from the overwhelming preoccupation that political rhetoric around Serbian schools sometimes implies. The worried minority is vocal, but it does not represent the majority view. Uncertainty here mirrors the broader knowledge gap we saw in other questions. The 24.2% who say they are "not sure" whether Serbian schools promote different narratives is perhaps the most analytically interesting response in this chart, and it connects directly to the findings from previous data. If 60% of respondents admitted they know very little about what is actually taught in Serbian-language schools, then it follows logically that a significant portion cannot confidently assess whether those schools promote conflicting historical or geographical narratives. They are not sure because they genuinely do not know and that uncertainty, rather than reflecting open-mindedness, reflects the same systemic information deficit identified earlier. This matters because narrative concerns, when left unaddressed by actual knowledge of curriculum content, tend to fill with assumption and political manipulation. The practical implication is that greater transparency about what Serbian-language schools teach would not only inform this debate more honestly, but would likely reduce the 21.2% "very concerned" figure among those whose concern rests on assumed rather than verified worst cases.

Textbooks, Teachers, and Universities

The questions examined in this section examine the specific and operationally consequential questions of what that integration of the education sector would look like in practice. What textbooks should Serbian-language schools use? Who should be allowed to teach in them? Should a Serbian-language university be permitted to operate in Kosovo, and if so, under what rules? These are questions that touch directly on curriculum control, professional standards, institutional legitimacy, and the degree to which parallel structures either converge with or remain insulated from Kosovo's legal framework.

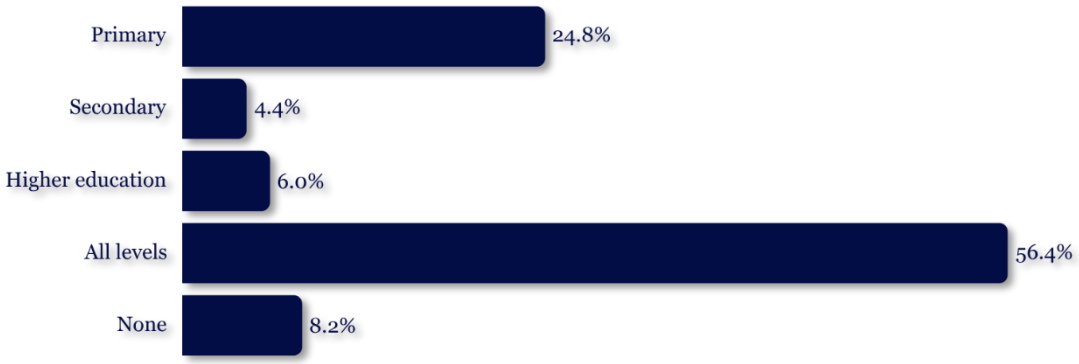
The findings in this section show that Kosovo Albanian public is more pragmatic and open to the integration of the current parallel education system. Across almost every question, the dominant response is not a flat refusal but a qualified acceptance, one that insists on Kosovo institutional authority, legal compliance, and standard professional requirements as the price of accommodation. The exception, and it is a significant one, is the question of a Serbian university, where opposition is the strongest recorded in the entire survey. Even there, however, a closer reading of the data suggests that the opposition may be directed at the current institution's extra-legal status rather than at Serbian-language higher education in principle.



Among Kosovo Albanians there is a clear majority preference for full integration. In this sense the finding in this chart, that is important to note is the strength of the preference for full integration under the Kosovo curriculum, chosen by 57.4% of respondents. This is a majority, and it sits well above any other option by a considerable margin. When read alongside the earlier finding that 79.6% support Serbian-language education under a Kosovo curriculum, this result makes sense and for the Kosovo Albanian public opinion has effectively already arrived at a preferred reform model, one that preserves linguistic rights while bringing Serbian-language schools fully within Kosovo's institutional framework. While full integration commands majority support, the 21.2% who prefer a hybrid model — Kosovo oversight with limited curricular autonomy — represent an important secondary finding. Combined with the 57.4% who favor full integration, this means that 78.6% of respondents support some form of meaningful institutional change, with only 11.6% preferring to maintain the current system and 8.2% favoring coordination without integration. The hybrid option is particularly significant from the policy and legislative standpoint, as it is also to a certain degree what Kosovo's legislation enables. In a context where Kosovo Serb communities have strong attachments to their existing educational arrangements and where Belgrade's influence over those arrangements remains a live political issue, the hybrid model is a realistic potential way forward and framing it as such could serve as a credible and face-saving first step. The data

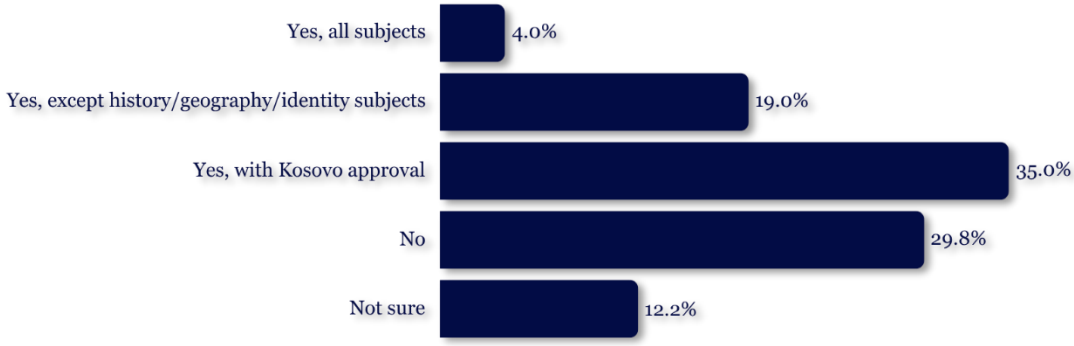
suggests that such a compromise would retain the support of a large majority of Kosovo Albanians. Sometimes the most useful finding in a survey is not the majority preference but the second option, and here, the second option looks like a workable bridge and what Kosovo legislation actually allows.

At which education levels should integration be mandatory?



The data here is more unambiguous. When asked at which education levels integration should be mandatory, 56.4% of respondents chose "all levels" this makes it by far the most popular answer and, again, an absolute majority position. A further 24.8% chose primary education specifically, bringing the total who support mandatory integration at some level to over 80%. Only 8.2% said integration should be mandatory at none. This is one of the strongest signals in the entire survey that not only do most Kosovo Albanian respondents support integration in principle, but the majority of them want it applied comprehensively and without exception across the education system. The 24.8% who selected primary education as the level where integration should be mandatory — the second most popular response after "all levels" — offers a practical insight for those thinking about sequencing integration process. Primary education is where habits of interaction, shared identity, and social trust are first formed, and the public appears to intuitively understand this. When combined with the "all levels" majority, it is clear that whatever starting point policymakers choose, there is strong public support for beginning early and expanding from there. The negligible support for integration only at secondary or higher education levels — 4.4% and 6% respectively — further reinforces this reading.

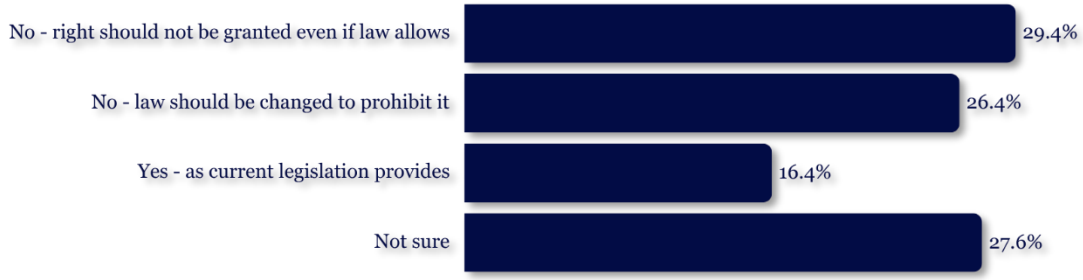
Should Serbian-language schools be allowed to use textbooks from Serbia?



The majority of Kosovo Albanians accepts Serbian-language textbooks under some conditions and the law already provides a framework for exactly that. The survey data from the chart shows that only 29.8% of respondents flatly oppose allowing Serbian-language schools to use textbooks from Serbia. A combined 58% support it in some form — 35% with Kosovo government approval, 19% except for history/geography/identity subjects, and 4% unconditionally. This is a significant majority, and it reflects also what Kosovo legislation says, and in other words the legal architecture for this already exists. Article 12 (2) of Law No. 03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo explicitly states that schools teaching in Serbian may apply curricula or textbooks developed by the Serbian Ministry of Education upon notification to Kosovo's Ministry of Education.[24] Article 12.3 adds that if the Ministry raises no objection within three months, the material may be used. Article 12.4 provides that disputes go to an independent commission for review against the Constitution and applicable law. This is precisely the "Kosovo approval" mechanism that 35% of survey respondents — the single largest group — said they would accept. Nearly 30% are opposed entirely which suggests deep public sensitivity around identity subjects in particular. The 19% who support textbook use "except for history/geography/identity subjects" are pointing directly at the core of the problem which is precisely those subjects where the curricula may diverge most sharply on narratives about Kosovo's status, history, and identity.

[24] See the law https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2543&langid=2

Should Serbs have the right to establish a university in Kosovo?

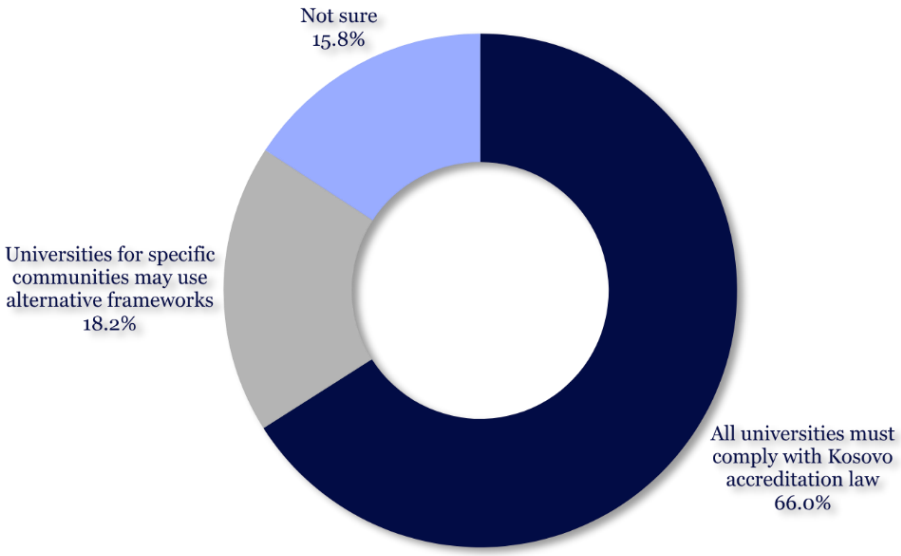


Opposition here is the strongest in the survey. A majority of the Kosovo Albanian oppose university rights for the Kosovo Serbs even where the law permits them and this is the most concerning gap between the legal entitlement by Kosovo legislation and public legitimacy. The combined "no" position commands 55.8% of respondents on the question if Kosovo Serbs should have the right to establish a university in Kosovo. In other words, 29.4% say the right should not be granted even if the law allows it, and 26.4% go further, arguing the law itself should be changed to prohibit it. Only 16.4% support the right as current legislation provides. This is a striking as the largest single group is not opposed to the law per se, but opposed to exercising a right the law already grants. Public sentiment is running against what the legal framework in Kosovo recognizes. As already noted on the section on policy and institutional analysis the law on local sel-government in article 21 clearly states that "The municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North shall have competence for the provision of higher education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators." Article 14 of Law No. 03/L-068 further details this framework specifically for the University of Mitrovica North. It designates the university as an autonomous public institution, establishes a seven-member independent commission for statute review, and obliges the municipality to ensure adequate premises and funding from the Kosovo state budget. So, Kosovo legislation does not only tolerate a university for Kosovo Serbs it makes it legally mandatory, it structures and funds it as well. Yet fewer than one in six survey respondents support exercising precisely this legal right.

The 27.6% "not sure" response signals an uninformed public and the law's complexity may itself be part of the problem. More than a quarter of respondents declined to take a position. What this figure more plausibly reflects is unfamiliarity with what the law actually provides and what the university in question actually does. Article 14(f) of Law No. 03/L-068 requires that funding from the Serbian government to the university "must be transparent and made public, in accordance with the laws of Kosovo." This transparency obligation has not produced public understanding so the "not sure" bloc suggests that most people simply do not know what legal arrangements govern the university, who funds it, or what its graduates' status is. In other words, when 27.6% are undecided and only 16.4% actively support the legal status quo, the state has a transparency and communication failure on its hands, not just a political one.

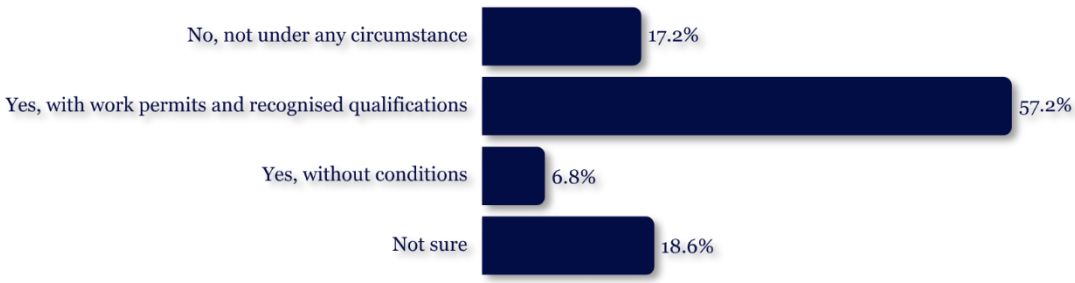
Important to note here the contrast with the other result where 88.8% accept mother-tongue education rights. Perhaps rejection to the university rights, may reflect the specific institutional history of the University of in Mitrovica, which denies Kosovo's statehood and functions as the most visible symbol of the parallel-state structure. So the opposition may be to that institution's current extra-legal status, more than to Serbian-language higher education in principle. The result below supports this reading.

Position on universities operating in Kosovo



There is a strong, clear public consensus among Kosovo Albanians that equal legal standards should apply to all universities, including the Kosovo Serbian one. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) hold that all universities must comply with Kosovo accreditation law, without exception. This is a plurality, and it is the single dominant position by a wide margin, more than three times larger than the next response. The minority that accepts alternative frameworks is too small to anchor a sustainable special-status arrangement. Only 18.2% support the position that universities serving specific communities may use alternative frameworks — and 15.8% are undecided. Given that the dominant answer is so clearly in favor of uniform accreditation, it is more likely that the undecided 15.8% would, if pushed, lean toward the majority position rather than toward the minority one. The gap between 55.8% opposed to a Serbian university in previous question and 66% supporting universal accreditation compliance here points in the direction that more respondents accept a Kosovo Serbian-language university when it is embedded in Kosovo's legal framework than when the question is posed as an abstract right divorced from institutional compliance.

Should teachers from Serbia be allowed to work in Kosovo?



When it comes to the question of allowing teachers from Serbia to work in Kosovo, the Kosovo Albanian public response is a conditional "yes". So, the debate is about the conditions, not the principle. A strong majority of 57.2% of respondents support allowing teachers from Serbia to work in Kosovo, provided they hold work permits and recognised qualifications. When you add the 6.8% who would allow it without any conditions at all, the total in favor of some form of permission reaches 64%. Meanwhile, only 17.2% oppose it under any circumstance. This distribution suggests that the question of whether Serbian teachers should be allowed to work in Kosovo is, for most people, already answered in the affirmative. The real conversation is on the terms. Only 17.2% hold an absolute position against Serbian teachers working in Kosovo under any circumstance. This is a minority view, and a relatively modest one. However, the 18.6% who are "not sure" are almost as large as the opposition group, and their eventual disposition matters for how robust the 64% pro-permission consensus actually is. The key question is what drives the undecided response. Unlike the previous question where the dominant answer was so overwhelming that the undecided group's direction barely changed the picture, here the "not sure" figure is large enough that if it broke heavily against permission, it would bring total opposition close to 36%, a non-trivial minority. The more plausible reading, however, is that people who are unsure about Serbian teachers are not ideologically opposed but are uncertain about the practical details, in terms of how qualifications would be recognised, how work permits would function, what oversight would look like.

Information Environment

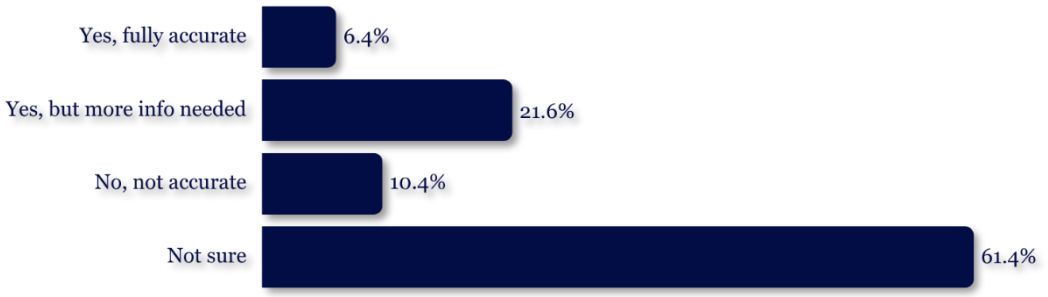
Awareness that Kosovo legislation governs all schools' accreditation



There is a prevailing poor or total lack of awareness about the legislative framework of Kosovo on the rights of non-majority communities in the education sector. As illustrated in the graph, 73.2% of respondents (combining "No, not aware" at 36.2% and "Not sure" at 37.0%) cannot confirm knowledge of the Kosovo legislation governing school accreditation. This near-supermajority of uncertainty signals a systemic gap between what we have as law or policy in Kosovo and public awareness about such rules. This suggests that Kosovo's government communication strategy is failing at the dissemination level, meaning the problem is not the legislation/law itself, but its reach. The fact that "Not sure" (37.0%) marginally edges out "No, not aware" (36.2%) as the largest single response category is analytically important. A respondent who says "not sure" is qualitatively different from one who says "no" as they have partial exposure to the concept but insufficient clarity to confirm it. This suggests that awareness campaigns or information have reached a portion of the population, but have failed to produce meaningful understanding. Combined with only 26.4% confirmed awareness, this points to a communication quality problem whereby information exists in fragmented or unclear forms rather than

being entirely absent. Policy interventions should therefore focus on clarity and comprehension, not just outreach volume. This perhaps one of the most policy-relevant results in the survey. The legal infrastructure for integration in Kosovo of the education sector already exists.

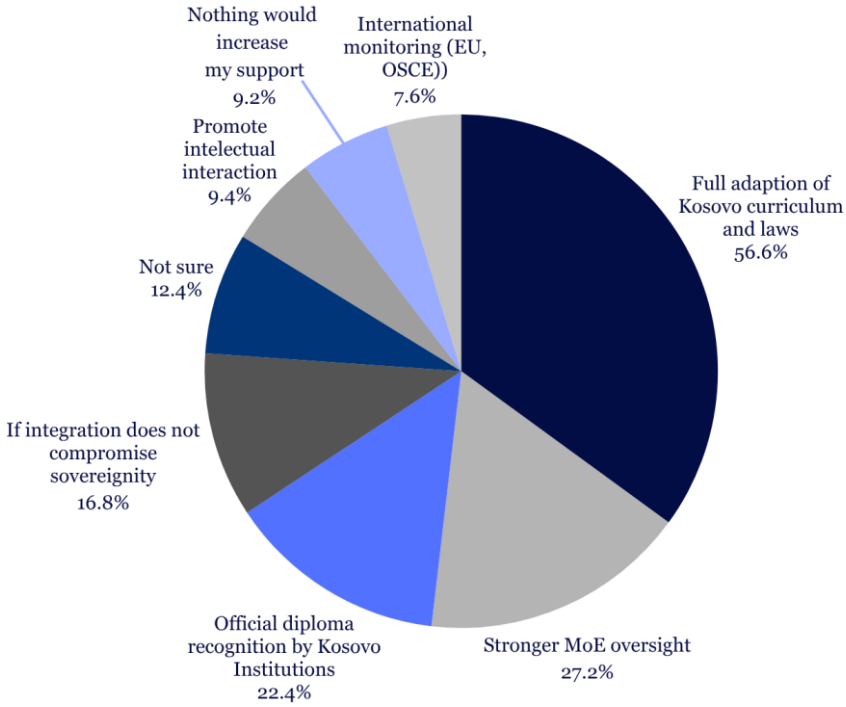
Are public discussions based on accurate information about Kosovo law?



The dominant finding on the question of relation between public debates and laws, is overwhelming with 61.4% of respondents answering "Not sure" whether public discussions are based on accurate information about Kosovo law. This is not a close or contested distribution but a commanding plurality that dwarfs every other response category combined. When the majority of people cannot even assess the accuracy of public discourse around legislation, it means that civic debate is effectively untethered from verifiable legal knowledge. This is particularly consequential in an educational integration/accreditation context, where misinformed public discussion can shape policy demands, and institutional behavior in ways that actively conflict with the actual legal framework. The data suggests Kosovo is not just facing an awareness problem but also, perhaps what we can term here, an epistemic crisis in public deliberation. Only 6.4% believe public discussions are fully accurate, while 21.6% offer a qualified yes which is acknowledging accuracy gaps themselves by noting more information is needed. This means that even among those willing to affirm some level of accuracy, the majority do so with reservations. Read alongside the previous question that only 26.4% were aware of the legislation at all, a clearer picture emerges that you cannot have informed public discussion about a law most people do not seem to know exists. These two questions together form a cause-and-effect narrative, or in other words, legal unawareness (Q13) directly produces uninformed public discourse (Q14). Citizens who cannot tell whether the information in circulation is reliable cannot participate meaningfully in policy debate.

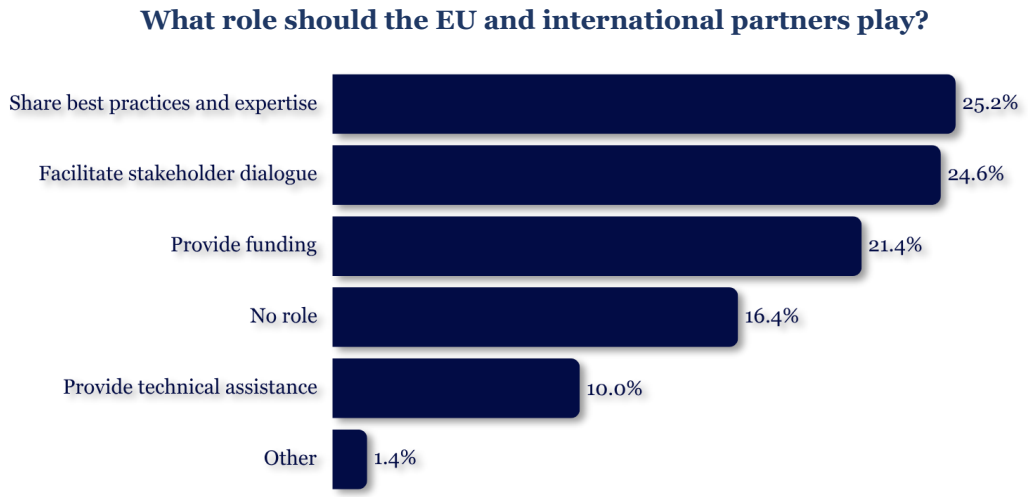
Conditions for Support

What would increase your support for integration? (up to 2 answers)



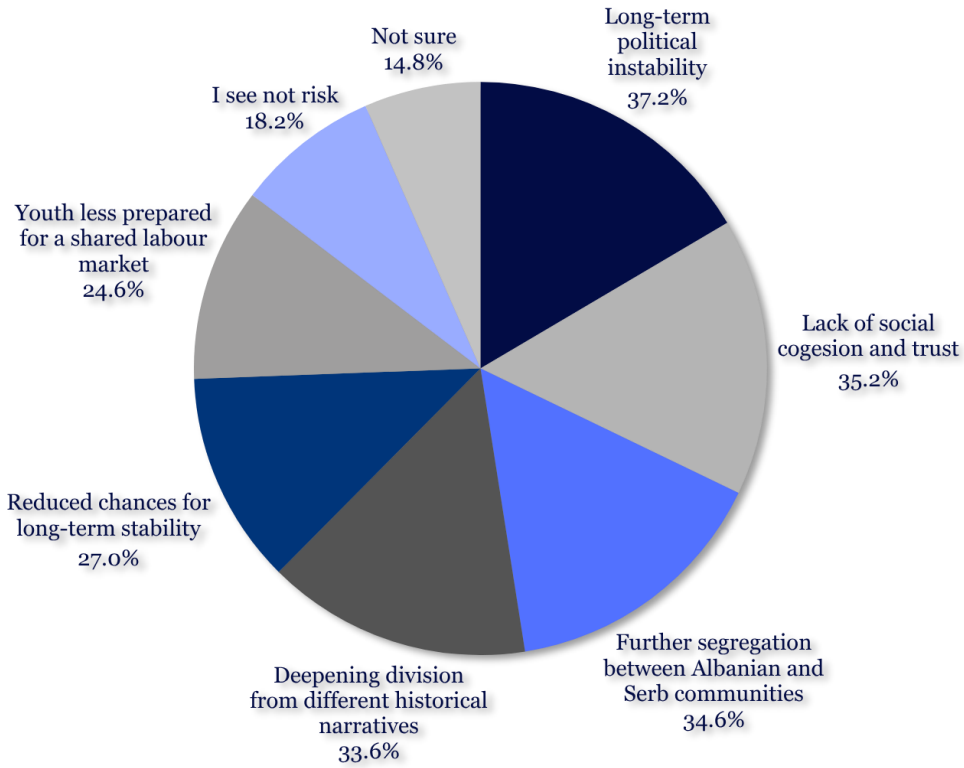
The data sends in this chart sends an unambiguous message with 56.6% of respondents, by far the largest share, opting for full adoption of Kosovo curriculum and laws as the primary condition for increasing their support for integration of the education sector. This figure is more than double the second-ranked response (Stronger ministry of education oversight at 27.2%) and towers over softer, relationship-based options like promoting intercultural interaction (9.4%) or international monitoring (7.6%). This hierarchy of preferences reveals that the surveyed population is fundamentally legalistic in its orientation toward integration, or in other words, they are not asking for cultural bridges or goodwill gestures, but for concrete, formal compliance with Kosovo's educational legal framework. While the majority of responses point toward conditions that could be met, 9.2% state that nothing would increase their support for integration. Though a minority, this figure is analytically important when read alongside the 16.8% who condition support on integration not compromising sovereignty. Kosovo Albanians seem to prioritises legal compliance over process conditions.

The role of the EU and International partners



Kosovo Albanians want the international partners as facilitators. The top two preferred rolesfor the EU and international partners are: sharing best practices and expertise (25.2%) and facilitating stakeholder dialogue (24.6%) and these together account for nearly half of all responses. Crucially, both reflect a preference for knowledge and process-based engagement rather than material intervention. Providing funding, though third at 21.4%, trails the leading options, suggesting that respondents do not primarily frame the integration challenge as a resource deficit. They seem to view the EU and international partners as most valuable when acting as conveners and knowledge-brokers. This has direct implications for how international actors should position their engagement by leading with technical credibility and dialogue facilitation. With 16.4% selecting "No role", this is the fourth largest response category, ahead of technical assistance (10.0%) and all remaining options. This level of resistance to any international involvement suggests that a meaningful portion of respondents view EU and engagement with international partners on integration of education as unwelcome or unnecessary in this context. When combined with the sovereignty concerns identified in Q15, this seems that a segment of the population draws a clear line around external influence in Kosovo's educational affairs. International partners operating in this space should be attentive to this sentiment, as interventions perceived as overreaching could actively reduce, rather than build, public support for integration efforts.

Long-Term Risks of the Status Quo



Kosovo Albanian respondents perceive educational separation as mainly a political and societal concern. The four highest-ranked risks — long-term political instability (37.2%), lack of social cohesion and trust (35.2%), further segregation between Albanian and Serb communities (34.6%), and deepening divisions from different historical narratives (33.6%) — all cluster within a narrow range and share a common theme which is that they are concerns about societal cohesion and governance. By contrast, reduced labour market preparedness (24.6%) ranks considerably lower. This suggests that respondents, at least among the Kosovo Albanians, intuitively understand segregation of the education sector in Kosovo, as a political and interethnic challenge first. For policymakers, this may matter as arguments for integration that lead with economic benefits may resonate less than those grounded in stability, trust-building, and community relations, at least for Kosovo Albanians. While the majority of respondents selected meaningful risks, 18.2% see no major risks and a further 14.8% are not sure and this together accounts for roughly one in three respondents. This is a substantial portion of the sample that either discounts or cannot articulate the consequences of continued educational separation. Read alongside previous question's finding that 9.2% said nothing would increase their support for integration, a principled disengagement seems to be the case. This group likely does not view segregation of the education sector as an issue requiring a solution.

Conclusions and recommendations

The survey produces five main conclusions.

First, language rights are not contested. 88.8% of respondents accept that Serbian pupils should be educated in their mother tongue. Albanian opposition to the parallel system is about institutional authority, not language. Conflating the two undermines both sides of the integration argument.

Second, support for integration is conditional and specific. The primary condition, the full curricular and legal compliance by Serbian-language schools with Kosovo legislation, is already what Kosovo law requires. Respondents also accept Serbian textbooks with Kosovo approval, Serbian teachers with proper credentials, and a Serbian-language university operating within Kosovo's accreditation framework. The position is consistent across all relevant questions.

Third, the information base is poor. 73.2% did not know Kosovo law already governs accreditation for all schools. 60.4% know little about what is taught in Serbian schools. 61.4% cannot assess whether public debate is accurate. These gaps mean current opinions, while genuine, are based on incomplete information and may shift considerably as facts become better known.

Fourth, the neutral bloc (41% on integration in Q6) is not a passive one. Its members hold clear preferences about conditions and model so they are waiting for a concrete, credible integration design before committing support.

Fifth, the preferred model for integration of education sector is also clear. 78.6% favour an integration model with Kosovo institutional authority — 57.4% full integration, 21.2% hybrid. Only 11.6% prefer the status quo.

The gap between 34% supporting integration overall (Q6) and 57.4% choosing full integration as their preferred model (Q7) reflects conditional acceptance in the neutral group. Translating latent preference into active public support is primarily a communication challenge.

The stronger opposition to a Serbian university (Q10, 55.8% opposed) compared to broad acceptance of language rights, textbooks, and teachers reflects the specific institutional history of the university operating in the north, rather than opposition to Serbian-language higher education in principle. Q11's 66% support for universal accreditation compliance confirms that embedding a Serbian-language institution within Kosovo's legal framework would attract more support.

Recommendations

For the Kosovo institutions

- When the objective circumstances allow, the integration of the education sector should be framed as implementation of the existing law, not a new policy. Integration requires accreditation and curriculum approval for all schools from Ministry of Education of Kosovo, which are provisions already in the Kosovo law. Presenting integration in these terms is both accurate and more likely to sustain public support than rhetorical framing around sovereignty assertions.
- Communicate explicitly that education institutions (schools and university) in Serbian-language is not at risk. The Kosovo Albanian public already accepts it so making this explicit reduces fear-based resistance in the Kosovo Serb community and avoids future misrepresentation of the government's position.

- Sequence integration starting at primary level. Public reservations are strongest on higher education, specifically regarding the university. Beginning with primary education allows the government to establish compliance precedents and build trust before addressing the more contested tertiary level.
- Launch a sustained public information campaign on the legal framework. 73.2% of surveyed Kosovo Albanians did not know Kosovo law already covers all schools. Without this basic factual foundation, public debate will continue to generate more heat than clarity.
- Extend and expand the diploma verification commission. Over 700 diplomas had been verified by March 2026. Expanding this mechanism improves outcomes for individual Serb graduates and creates an institutional precedent for integration at the tertiary level, independent of broader political negotiations.
- Commission a comprehensive mapping of Serbian-language schools. Such a mapping covering geographic reach, infrastructure, curricula, teacher qualifications, and legal compliance status is a precondition for evidence-based integration decisions.

For the civil society

- Produce and disseminate accessible public information on what Serbian-language schools actually teach, what Kosovo law requires, and what integration would and would not change. The 60.4% self-reported uninformedness is an actionable gap that civil society is better placed than government to fill.
- Develop and fund cross-community educational programmes such as joint projects, student exchanges, shared civic education. Political integration creates a framework; social trust requires direct interaction.
- Track public opinion longitudinally. Repeat surveys would show how information, political events, and communication affect Kosovo Albanian public opinion over time.

For International Partners (EU, OSCE, Council of Europe)

- The EU's formulation that integration must be "in accordance with agreed agreements and Kosovo laws" is correct but underspecified. Explicitly stating that Kosovo laws encompass accreditation requirements for all schools removes ambiguity.
- Decouple education integration from the Association of Serbian Municipalities. Linking the two has stalled both. Pursuing integration of schools as an implementation of the existing Kosovo legislation— and the Association separately as a political negotiating item — allows progress where it is achievable. However, it is clear that this might not be acceptable to the Kosovo Serb community and if done without proper consultation and coordination with the Kosovo Serb community, can have serious consequences.

Kosovo Serb Perspectives on the Integration of Serbian-Language Education

Ognjen Gogić

Introduction

The status of Serbian-language educational institutions operating in Kosovo within Serbia's education system is one of the unresolved institutional issues in relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Debates about their status and speculation about their possible integration into Kosovo's system have raised concerns among the Serb community in Kosovo, which relies on their services.25 The central question is what consequences a potential change in their status could have for pupils, students, and employees, as well as for the Serb community as a whole.

Kosovo already has a geographically dispersed and functionally interconnected Serbian-language education system operating within Serbia's education system. It encompasses preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education, including university and professional studies, and its constituent institutions are connected through common curricula, education cycles, assessment and examination rules, records, educational documents, and qualifications. Pupils and students are already at different stages of their education, employees have established employment relationships, institutions have established governance and financing arrangements, and higher education also has well-developed international cooperation.

At the same time, Kosovo's legal framework contains a number of provisions relevant to the organization of Serbian-language education. Serbian has the status of an official language, the right to public education in Serbian is guaranteed, the education competencies of municipalities are regulated, as are the use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia, cooperation with and financial support from Serbia, and the special legal status of a Serbian-language public university. These legal provisions, however, have not been implemented in practice. No network of educational institutions providing Serbian-language education within Kosovo's education system has been established under this legal framework.

Serbian-language education is currently provided by institutions operating within Serbia's education system. They serve the Serb community in different parts of Kosovo. Their status, organization, teaching process, records, employment relationships, and financing were not established under Kosovo's legal framework. A potential change in the status of these institutions would therefore not entail creating Serbian-language education from the ground up, but changing the institutional status of an existing and functionally interconnected education system.

Kosovo's laws and regulations govern how educational institutions are established, registered, licensed, and accredited, and the conditions under which they provide education within Kosovo's system. They do not, however, establish a special legal regime for taking over or changing the status of institutions that already operate within another education system, nor do they provide rules for the transition of the existing system as an interconnected whole. The regular procedures for establishing institutions and

[25] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Transcript of EUSR for Dialogue Sørensen's Press Remarks," March 14, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/transcript-eusr-dialogue-sorensen%E2%80%99s-press-remarks_en.

determining the conditions for their operation therefore do not, in themselves, answer the questions arising from the transfer of an established system from one legal and institutional framework to another.

The central question of this analysis is therefore whether a potential change in the status of the existing educational institutions, should one occur, could be implemented within Kosovo's current legal system while preserving continuity of education in Serb communities in Kosovo. This concerns not only the institutions' formal status, but also the continuation of pupils' and students' education, the validity of grades already completed, examinations passed, and qualifications obtained, the continuity of records and educational documents, established employment relationships, governance, financing, and the other functional links on which the existing system is based.

The analysis does not assume that the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions has been agreed or predetermined, that it is necessary or desirable, nor does it seek to propose a model for its implementation. Its purpose is to examine the scope and limits of Kosovo's existing legal framework in relation to a potential change in the status of the existing system, the consequences such a change could have, and the issues that would first have to be regulated in order to preserve continuity of education, the acquired rights of pupils and students, and the continuity of employees' established legal relationships.

The research applied two complementary methods, document analysis and a survey. The document analysis was used to examine the existing Serbian-language education system in Kosovo, Kosovo's legal framework relevant to Serbian-language education, and the agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. It covered the Constitution and relevant Kosovo legislation, secondary legislation, dialogue agreements, Serbia's regulations relevant to the operation of the existing education system, and official data and other available sources on Serbian-language education. Particular attention was given to rights related to Serbian-language education, the allocation of competencies, the use of curricula from Serbia, the status of the University, financing, recognition of qualifications, and opportunities for institutional cooperation.

The survey was used to examine the views of members of the Serb community regarding the existing educational institutions and their potential integration into Kosovo's system. The survey was conducted between March and April 2026 through face-to-face interviews with adult respondents, using a total sample of 300 respondents. Half of the sample, 150 respondents, came from the four municipalities north of the Ibar River, while 150 respondents came from Serb-majority areas south of the Ibar River.

The survey examined the importance of the existing educational institutions to respondents and their families, views on potential integration, trust in institutions, the acceptability of different scenarios, and the expected consequences of a potential change in status. Particular attention was given to concerns related to curricula, Serbian language and identity, quality of education, recognition of diplomas and qualifications, the status of employees, financing, and institutional ties with Serbia.

The analysis is organized into several interconnected sections. Following the introduction, it first presents the existing Serbian-language education system in Kosovo, its geographic distribution, functional interconnectedness, and educational progression pathways. It then presents the survey findings on the importance of these institutions to respondents from the Serb community, their views on potential integration, and the expected consequences of a change in the institutions' status.

The next chapter analyzes Kosovo's legal framework for Serbian-language education and identifies the rights, competencies, and mechanisms that it provides. It then considers the limits of the existing legal framework in relation to a potential change in the status of an education system that already operates within Serbia's system. A separate chapter examines the agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and their relevance to issues that fall beyond the scope of unilateral legal regulation.

The final discussion brings together the legal, institutional, and empirical findings and considers three interconnected preconditions for a potential institutional transition. The analysis finds that Kosovo's existing legal framework regulates a number of rights and mechanisms relevant to Serbian-language education, but was not designed as a regime for changing the status of a system that already operates within another legal and institutional framework. The Belgrade-Pristina agreements address certain issues relevant to education, but they also do not provide a comprehensive model for such a transition. At the same time, the survey findings show an almost complete absence of support for integration among respondents from the Serb community, a very low level of trust in Kosovo institutions, and pronounced concerns about possible consequences for curricula, quality of education, diploma recognition, the status of employees, and ties with Serbia.

On the basis of these findings, the discussion identifies three groups of issues that could not remain unregulated if any change in status were to be pursued. The first concerns the need for a special transitional legal framework regulating the continuity of education, records, qualifications, governance, financing, and already established legal relationships. The second concerns the need for an institutional mechanism capable of encompassing a geographically dispersed and functionally interconnected Serbian-language education system, including institutions located outside Serb-majority municipalities. The third concerns issues that produce legal, educational, or financial effects in both systems and therefore cannot be fully regulated through unilateral acts, but require an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. The final discussion thus shows that a potential change in status would not merely involve formally incorporating individual institutions into a new legal framework, but would also require preserving the continuity of the existing education system and preventing disruptions that would directly affect its users and the Serb community in Kosovo as a whole.

Educational institutions in Kosovo that teach in Serbian under Serbia's education system are not merely a collection of individual schools. They form a geographically dispersed and functionally interconnected system encompassing preschool institutions, primary and secondary schools, main schools and satellite classes, as well as higher education, which includes the University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica and the Academy of Applied Studies based in Leposavic.

Together, these institutions constitute the Serbian-language education system, based on common curricula, education cycles, assessment rules, records, official documents, and qualifications. Within this system, institutions continuously provide education, employees deliver instruction, and pupils and students attend programs. Any potential change in the status of these institutions would therefore concern an established and functioning education system, rather than the creation of Serbian-language education from the ground up.

Geographic Distribution

Any assessment of the current organization of the Serbian-language education system in Kosovo must take into account the number, type, and geographic distribution of its constituent institutions. Complete and regularly updated official data on its institutional and geographic coverage, however, are not available. The Statistical Office of Serbia states that it has not had data for Kosovo since 1999 and that such data are not included in its regular aggregate education statistics.[26] According to an overview published by the European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo in 2018, the network of Serbian-language educational institutions in Kosovo was estimated to include approximately 69 primary and 34 secondary schools, attended by about 17,456 pupils.[27] The institutions were distributed across six of Kosovo's seven regions, all except Gjakova. According to data from Serbia's education administration from 2021, 71 primary, 29 secondary, and 18 preschool institutions operated in Kosovo within Serbia's system. Primary education was attended by 10,735 pupils and secondary education by 4,785 pupils.[28]

Serbian-language education is not limited to northern Kosovo or solely to Serb-majority municipalities. Serbian-language educational institutions are located in the municipalities of northern Kosovo, in Serb-majority municipalities south of the Ibar River, and in Serb communities belonging to municipalities in which the Serb community is not the majority. The network also includes satellite classes that provide access to education in smaller, geographically remote, and returnee communities.

At the higher education level, the University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica plays the central role. The University has maintained institutional and legal continuity since its establishment in 1969. After relocating from Pristina in 1999, it continued to operate within Serbia's higher education system, and since 2001 its temporary seat has been located in North Mitrovica. According to University data, it comprises ten faculties, with approximately 9,000 students and more than one hundred study

[26] Statistical Office of Serbia, "Education - Metadata," Section 03.7, "Reference Area," https://data.stat.gov.rs/Metadata/11_Obrazovanje/Html/11_ESMS_G0_2016_2.html.

[27] European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo, Education in Serbian Language in Kosovo, November 2018, https://www.ecmikosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Education-in-Serbian-Language-_ENG.pdf.

[28] Kosovo Online, "Zaporozac: There Are More Than 15,000 Pupils in Serb Communities in Kosovo, and the Goal Is to Increase That Number," June 2, 2021, https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/drustvo/zaporozac-u-srpskim-sredinama-na-kosovu-imamo-preko-15000-ucenika-cilj-da-ih-bude-jos.

programs at different levels. Its faculties are located in North Mitrovica, Zvecan, and Leposavic, demonstrating that higher education also has an intermunicipal geographic structure.[29] In addition to the University, the Academy of Applied Studies based in Leposavic also operates within Serbia's higher education system.[30]

Functional Interconnectedness and Educational Progression

Although Serbian-language educational institutions are geographically distributed across different areas, they do not operate as separate entities, but as parts of a single education system. The system includes institutions at different levels, from preschool through higher education, operating in different local communities. These institutions are connected by more than a common language of instruction. The systemic nature of Serbian-language education derives precisely from the fact that these institutions apply a common curricular and qualifications framework, organize instruction through connected cycles, and maintain records that enable pupils and students to continue their education within the same system. Through these links, institutions located in different areas operate as parts of a single Serbian-language education system in Kosovo.

The functional interconnectedness of the Serbian-language education system in Kosovo has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontal interconnectedness exists among institutions at the same level of education, which follow the same curricula, apply common assessment and examination rules, maintain records, and issue official documents under the same regulations. As a result, a pupil who changes schools within the system can continue in the corresponding grade and under the same curriculum.

Vertical interconnectedness exists across different levels of education. In Serbia's system, primary education is compulsory and lasts eight years. It is organized into two cycles of four grades each. After completing the eighth grade, pupils take a final examination and apply for admission to general, vocational, or arts secondary schools. After completing four-year secondary education and meeting the admission requirements, pupils may continue their education at the University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica, the Academy of Applied Studies, or other higher education institutions within Serbia's system. Primary and secondary schools, the University, and the Academy therefore form connected parts of the same education pathway. At the same time, the University educates some of the teaching, professional, and administrative staff required by other educational institutions within the system.

International Connections and Recognition of Educational Qualifications

Serbian-language educational institutions operating in Kosovo within Serbia's system are connected not only to institutions and authorities within that system. The educational documents they issue are official documents of Serbia's education system and may be used for further education or employment abroad, in accordance with the recognition rules and procedures applied by the receiving country or institution.[31]

International connections are particularly well developed in higher education. The University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica holds an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education for the 2021-

[29] University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica, https://pr.ac.rs/.

[30] Academy of Applied Studies, http://ves-pec.edu.rs/.

[31] ENIC-NARIC Networks, "Individuals Wishing to Study/Work Abroad," https://www.enic-naric.net/page-individuals-wishing-study-work-abroad.

2027 period, which enables it to participate in European Union programs in the fields of higher education, student and staff mobility, and cooperation with foreign higher education institutions.[32] In European programs, the University is registered under Erasmus code XK KOSOVKS01, PIC number 951280553, and OID number E10127429.[33]

The University states that it has established cooperation with more than 90 universities in Europe and other parts of the world through bilateral agreements. It is a full member of the European University Association, a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum, and participates in programs and projects such as Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, Horizon Europe, and CEEPUS. Through Erasmus+ international credit mobility, it has cooperated with universities in Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Greece, Romania, Hungary, and other countries. On the basis of these links, the University operates as part of the broader European and international space of higher education, research cooperation, and academic mobility.[34]

Implications of a Potential Change in Status

The systemic nature of existing Serbian-language education in Kosovo is important for understanding the consequences of any potential change in the status of its constituent institutions. Such a change would not concern individual schools as mutually independent institutions, but a functionally interconnected system in which pupils' and students' education pathways, employees' work, records, documents, qualifications, and institutional links form part of a common education framework.

Pupils and students are already at different stages of education, employees have established employment and other legal relationships, and institutions maintain records, organize examinations, and issue educational documents. There are therefore acquired rights of pupils and students that must be protected, as well as established employment relationships whose continuity should be regulated by law in order to preserve legal certainty in education.

A change in the status of the institutions could therefore also affect the existing international usability of qualifications and the education pathways of pupils and students. In the case of the University, a change in status would also raise the question of continuity for its existing international identifiers, projects, agreements, memberships, student and staff mobility, recognition of ECTS credits earned, and other forms of academic cooperation. The loss or interruption of these links could directly affect opportunities for students and employees and the international usability of the qualifications issued by the University.

The potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions would therefore not entail establishing Serbian-language education from the ground up, but changing the status of an already functioning education system. Such a change would raise questions concerning continuity of the education process, educational progression, protection of the acquired rights of pupils and students, continuity of employees' established legal relationships, and preservation of the other functions and links on which the existing system is based. The importance of this system to members of the Serb community and the concerns they associate with a potential change are examined in the next chapter.

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[32] University of Pristina in North Mitrovica, "ERASMUS+," https://en.pr.ac.rs/international/international-programmes/erasmus/.

[33] University of Pristina in North Mitrovica, "PIC & OID Numbers," https://en.pr.ac.rs/international/international-programmes/erasmus/pic-oid-numbers/.

[34] University of Pristina in North Mitrovica, "Networks & Cooperations," https://en.pr.ac.rs/international/networks-cooperations/.

Views of the Serb Community on the Potential Integration of Educational Institutions

The potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system would not merely constitute a legal and administrative change in their status. It would directly affect pupils, students, parents, and employees, as well as the continuation of education, recognition of qualifications, institutional ties with Serbia, and the Serb community's broader sense of security in Kosovo. The views of users of the existing system are therefore important for assessing the consequences that such a change could have for the Serb community.

The survey presented in this chapter examines how respondents from the Serb community perceive a potential change in the status of educational institutions and the concerns, expectations, and priorities they associate with this process. The research covered the level of support for or opposition to integration, trust in institutions, the acceptability of different institutional scenarios, the expected impact on the quality of education and the community's position, and concerns related to curricula, diploma recognition, institutional governance, financing, and the status of employees. It also considered possible responses by parents and families if the change were to result in a decline in the quality of education or the loss of existing rights. The findings therefore show the risks that respondents associate with a potential change to the existing system.

Methodological Notes

The survey was conducted between March and April 2026 using a total sample of 300 adult respondents. Respondents from the Serb community were evenly distributed between two broader geographic areas:

- 150 respondents from the four municipalities north of the Ibar River;
- 150 respondents from Serb-majority areas south of the Ibar River.

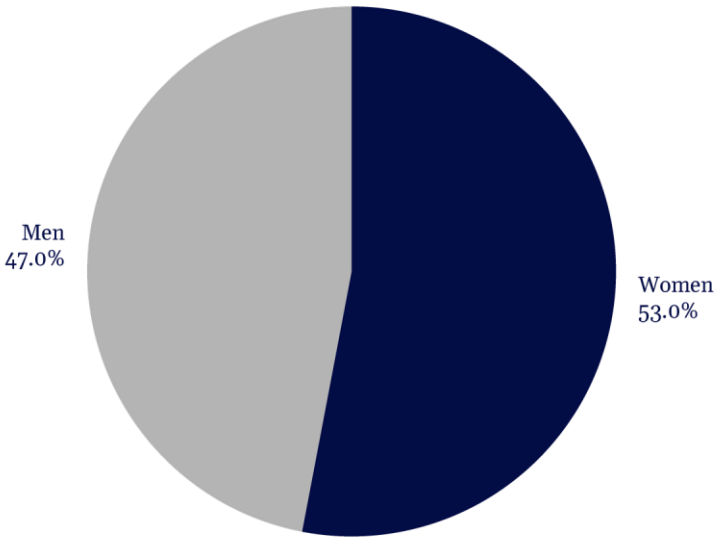
Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire composed primarily of closed-ended questions with predefined response options. Some questions allowed respondents to select more than one answer.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The demographic structure of the sample shows that the survey predominantly covered younger and working-age respondents, with a high proportion of people who had completed secondary or higher education.

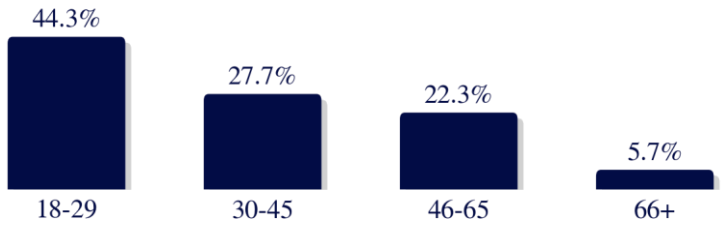
Sample Structure by Respondent Gender

Women are slightly overrepresented in the sample, accounting for 53% of respondents, while men account for 47%.



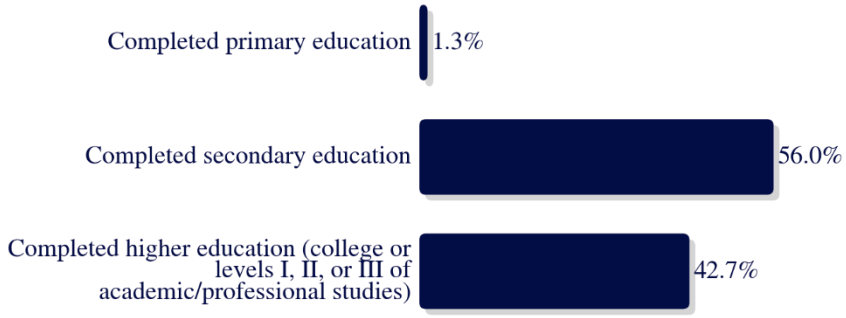
Sample Structure by Respondent Age

By age, respondents aged 18 to 29 constitute the largest group at 44.3%, followed by respondents aged 30 to 45 at 27.7%. The 46-to-65 age group accounts for 22.3%, while respondents over the age of 66 account for 5.7% of the sample.



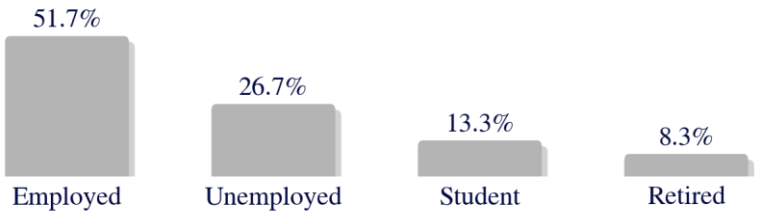
Sample Structure by Respondent Education

Most respondents (56%) have completed secondary education, while 42.7% have completed a college or university degree or another level of academic or professional studies. Primary education is the highest level completed by 1.3% of respondents.



Sample Structure by Respondent Employment Status

Most respondents (51.7%) are employed, 26.7% are unemployed, 13.3% are students, and 8.3% are retired.

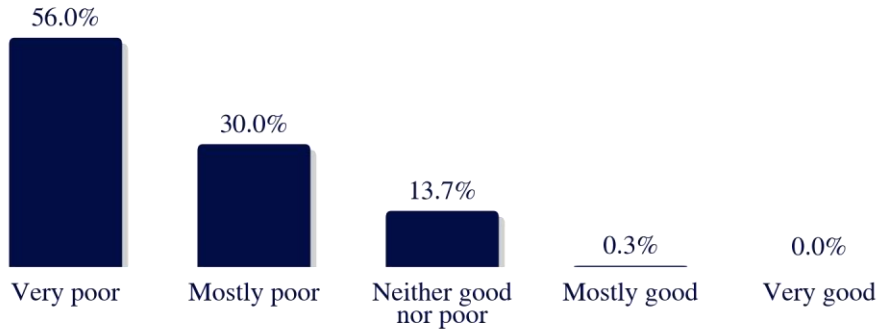


Overall Position of the Community

The first set of questions concerned respondents' general assessment of the position of the Serb community in Kosovo, changes over recent years, and expectations for the coming period. The responses show an extremely negative assessment of the current situation and prevailing pessimism about future developments.

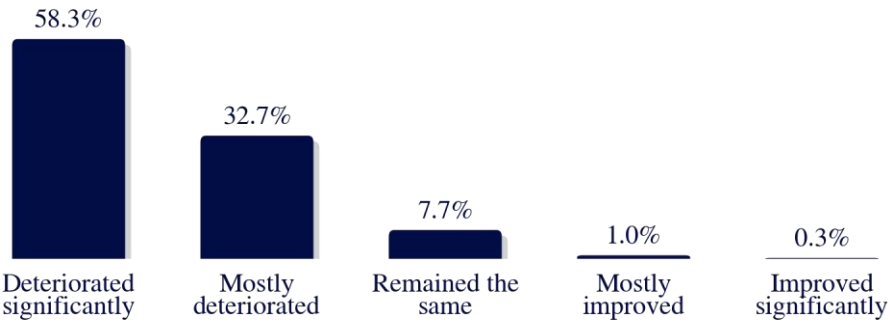
How would you assess the current position of the Serb community in Kosovo?

A total of 86% of respondents assess the current position of the Serb community as poor, with 56% describing it as very poor and 30% as mostly poor. No respondent assessed the position of the Serb community as very good.



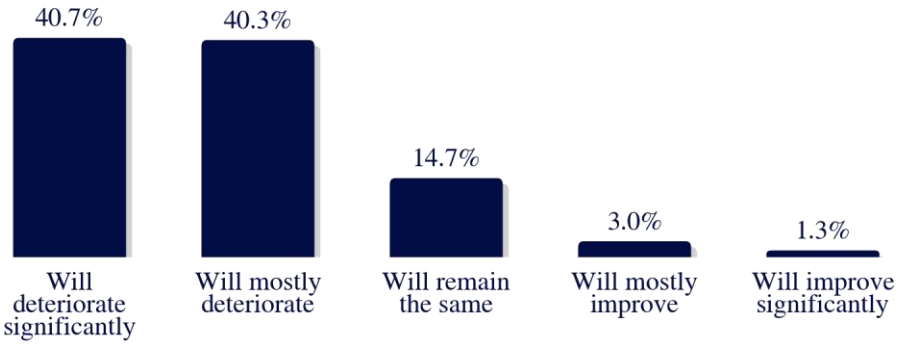
Do you believe that the position of the Serb community in Kosovo has deteriorated or improved in recent years?

A total of 91% of respondents believe that the position of the Serb community has deteriorated in recent years, with 58.3% assessing that it has deteriorated significantly and 32.7% that it has mostly deteriorated.



How do you expect the position of the Serb community in Kosovo to change in the coming period?

A total of 81% of respondents expect the position of the Serb community to deteriorate further, with 40.7% believing that it will deteriorate significantly and 40.3% that it will mostly deteriorate.

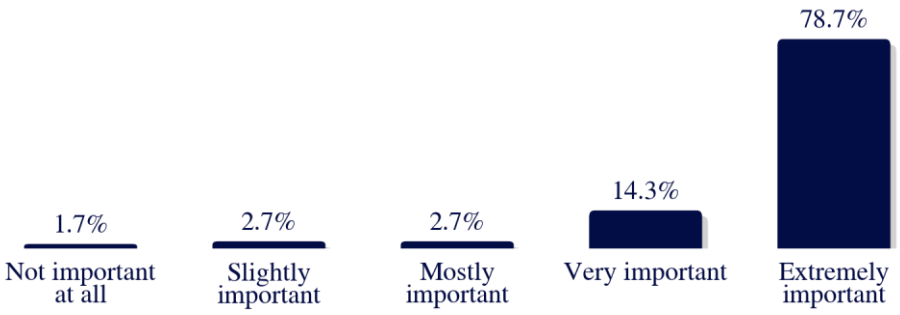


Importance of Educational Institutions

In the next questions, respondents first assessed how important the services provided by Serbian-language educational institutions in Kosovo are to them and their families. They then indicated the extent to which they were aware of announcements concerning the institutions' potential integration into Kosovo's system.

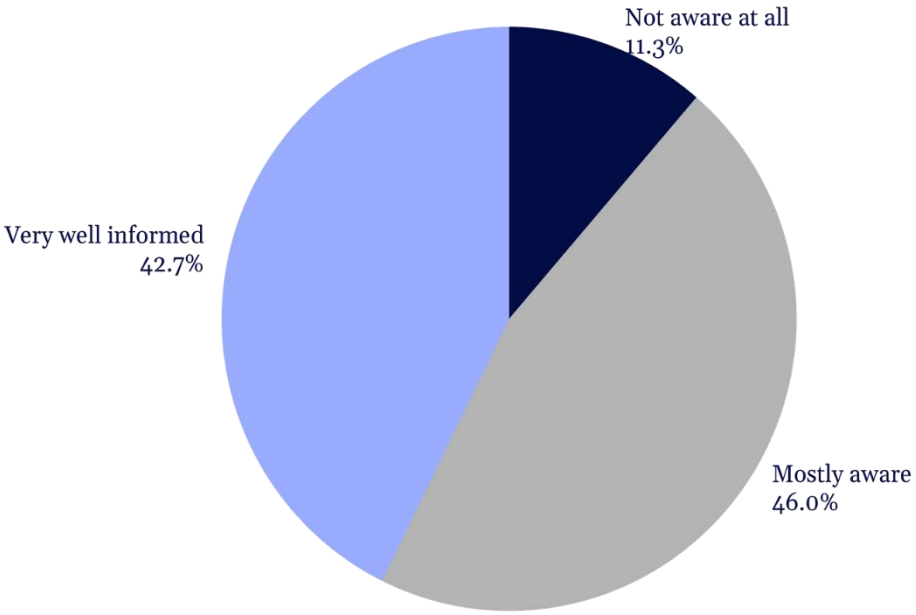
How important are the services provided by Serbian-language educational institutions in Kosovo to you and your family?

A total of 93% of respondents assess the services provided by Serbian-language educational institutions as very or extremely important to them and their families. They are considered extremely important by 78.7% of respondents and very important by 14.3%.



Are you aware of announcements concerning the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system?

A total of 88.7% of respondents state that they are aware of announcements concerning the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions. A total of 42.7% consider themselves very well informed and 46% mostly informed.

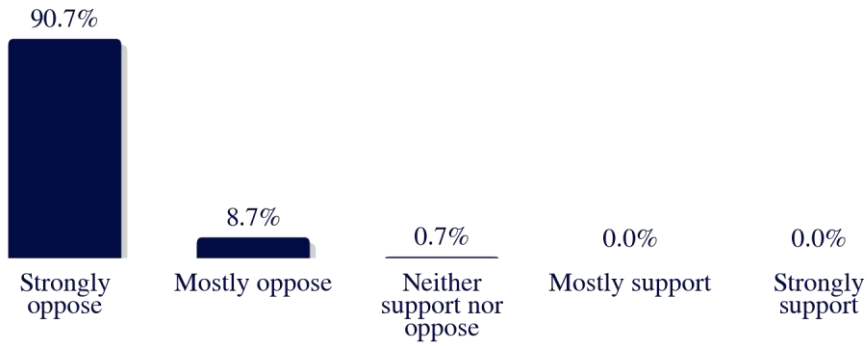


Views on the Potential Integration of Educational Institutions

The next questions concerned respondents' views on the potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system and the scenario they consider most acceptable for the future of the Serbian-language education sector in Kosovo.

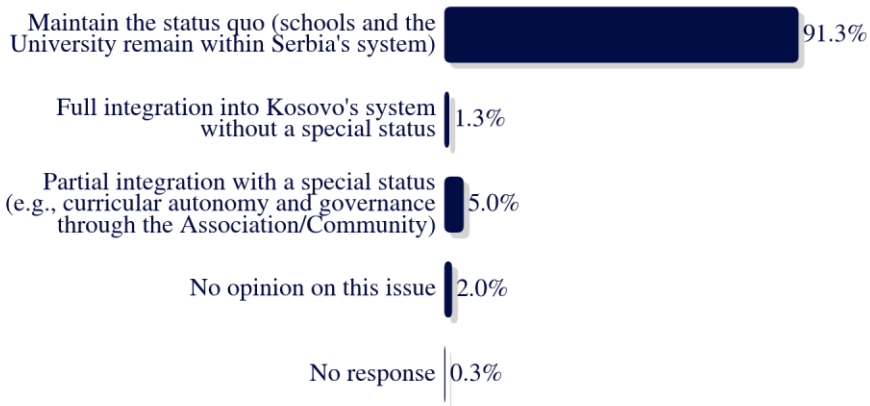
What is your view on the potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions, primary and secondary schools and the University, into Kosovo's system?

A total of 99.4% of respondents oppose the potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions. A total of 90.7% strongly oppose it, while a further 8.7% mostly oppose it.



In your opinion, which scenario would be most acceptable for the future of the Serbian-language education sector in Kosovo?

Maintaining the status quo, under which schools and the University would continue to operate within Serbia's system, is selected as the most acceptable scenario by 91.3% of respondents. Partial integration with a special status is supported by 5%, while full integration without a special status is selected by 1.3%.

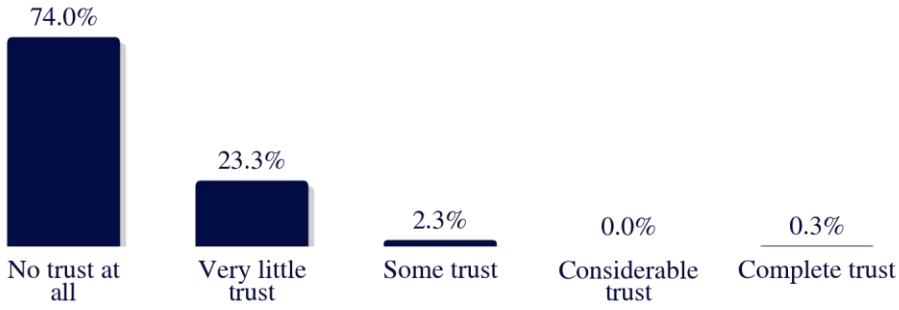


Expected Impact of Integration

This set of questions examined trust that Kosovo institutions would respect the education rights of the Serb community in the event of integration. Respondents also indicated who should play the leading role in protecting those rights and assessed how integration would affect the position of the Serb community in Kosovo.

How much do you trust that Kosovo institutions would respect the education rights of the Serb community if the educational institutions were integrated?

A total of 74% of respondents state that they have no trust at all that Kosovo institutions would respect the education rights of the Serb community in the event of integration. A further 23.3% state that they have very little trust.



In your opinion, who should play the leading role in protecting the rights of the Serb community during the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system? (Respondents could select up to three options.)

A total of 71.7% of respondents believe that the Government of Serbia should play the leading role in protecting the rights of the Serb community during the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions. International organizations are cited by 11.7%, non-governmental organizations by 7.3%, and Serb politicians in Kosovo by 5.3% of respondents.



How do you assess the impact that integrating Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system would have on the position of the Serb community in Kosovo?

A total of 98.7% of respondents assess that integrating Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system would have a negative impact on the position of the Serb community. A significantly negative impact is expected by 79%, and a mostly negative impact by a further 19.7%. No respondent stated that they expected integration to have a positive effect.



Conditions for Integration

In the next set of questions, respondents identified the guarantees and conditions they would consider necessary in the event of the potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system. Their selection of individual responses should not be interpreted as a willingness to accept integration if those conditions were met, particularly given that three-quarters of respondents oppose integration under any conditions. Respondents were also specifically asked whether they would keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration.

Which of the following conditions do you consider necessary for the potential integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system? (Respondents could select up to three options.)

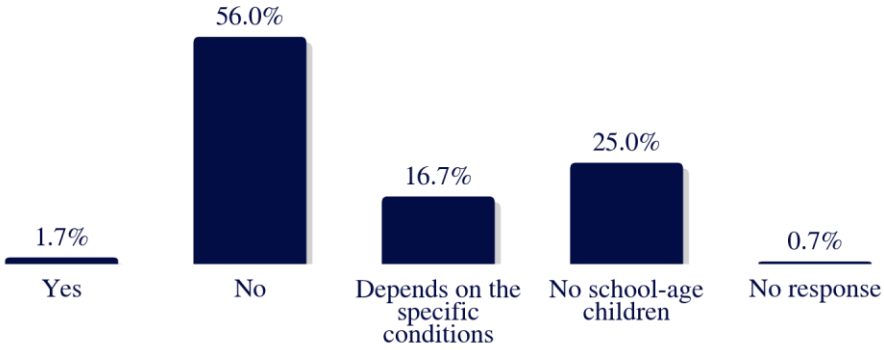
When asked about the conditions necessary for potential integration, the most frequent response was opposition to integration under any conditions, selected by 75.4% of respondents. Among the proposed guarantees and conditions, the most frequently selected were a guaranteed Serbian-language curriculum aligned with Serbia's standards, selected by 37% of respondents, institutional links between the institutions and Serb-majority municipalities or the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities, selected by 30.7%, and recognition in Serbia of diplomas and qualifications obtained, selected by 28%. Full information and participation of the Serb community in the process was selected by 23%, while 21.7% selected guaranteed financing of the institutions' operations from Serbia's budget.

Response	Share
Full information and participation of the Serb community in the integration process	23.00%
International guarantees and oversight (EU, OSCE, UNMIK...)	6.00%
Guaranteed employment status and salaries for employees	10.90%
Guaranteed Serbian-language curriculum aligned with Serbia's standards	37.00%
Recognition in Serbia of diplomas and qualifications obtained	28.00%
The Serb community must select the institutions' management and teaching staff	18.90%
The institutions must be institutionally linked to Serb-majority municipalities or the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities	30.70%
Guaranteed financing of these institutions from Serbia's budget	21.70%
Limited and precisely defined powers of Kosovo institutions to inspect these institutions	2.70%
I do not believe that special conditions are necessary	2.70%
I oppose the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions under any conditions	75.40%

Would you keep your child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration?

Across the full sample, more than half of respondents (56%) stated that they would not keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration. For 16.7% of respondents, the decision would depend on the specific conditions, while 1.7% stated that they would keep their child in the school without additional reservations. One-quarter of respondents, 25%, do not have school-age children.

Among respondents who have school-age children, 74.7% stated that they would not keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration. For 22.2%, the decision would depend on the specific conditions, while only 2.2% would keep their child in the school without additional reservations.



Potential Consequences of Integration

The final set of questions concerned the main integration-related concerns, its expected impact on the quality of education in Serb communities, and the options respondents would consider if the quality of education declined or certain rights were lost.

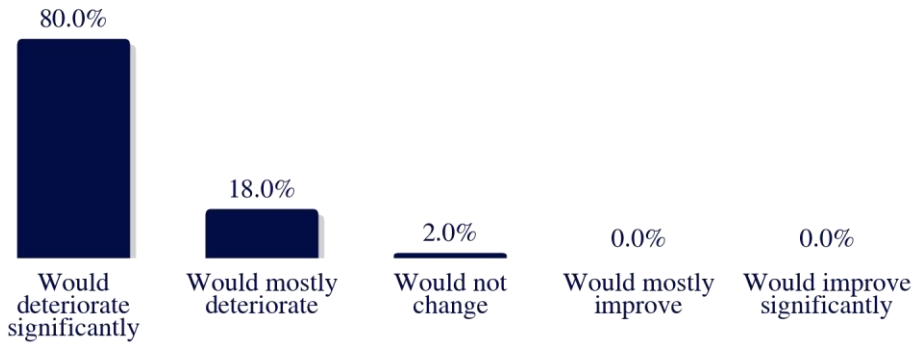
What concerns you most about the integration of Serbian-language educational institutions into Kosovo's system? (Respondents could select up to three options.)

The most frequently expressed concern was that instruction might no longer follow Serbia's curricula, selected by 45.9% of respondents. The loss or weakening of the Serbian language, identity, and cultural content in education was identified by 39.2%, while 38.5% of respondents identified the possibility that diplomas and qualifications obtained would not be recognized in Serbia. The possibility that Kosovo institutions could impose changes to teaching content was selected by 37.7%, while 24.9% of respondents cited the closure of existing schools or relocation of the University as a concern.

Response	Share
Decline in the quality of education	14.60%
Instruction would no longer follow Serbia's curricula	45.90%
Diplomas and qualifications obtained would not be recognized in Serbia for further education or employment	38.50%
Possibility that Kosovo institutions could impose changes to teaching content, for example in subjects such as history and geography	37.70%
Loss or weakening of the Serbian language, identity, and cultural content in education	39.20%
Introduction of additional subjects and curricula without the consent of the Serb community	12.00%
Discretionary decision-making by Kosovo institutions regarding the operation of schools and the University	6.10%
Increased or arbitrary inspection and administrative oversight	1.00%
Discrimination against or unequal treatment of education employees	16.00%
Salary reductions or job losses	5.80%
Closure of existing schools or relocation of the University	24.90%
Nothing in particular concerns me	3.00%

How do you think the integration of educational institutions would affect the quality of education in Serb communities in Kosovo?

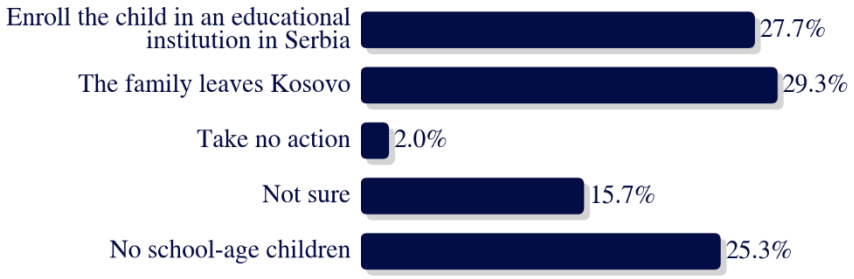
Almost all respondents, 98%, expect that integrating the educational institutions would negatively affect the quality of education in Serb communities in Kosovo. A total of 80% believe that the quality would deteriorate significantly, while 18% believe that it would mostly deteriorate. No respondent expects integration to improve the quality of education.



If the integration of educational institutions resulted in a decline in the quality of education or the loss of certain rights, which option would you consider?

If the integration of educational institutions resulted in a decline in the quality of education or the loss of certain rights, 29.3% of respondents stated that they would consider their family leaving Kosovo, while 27.7% would consider enrolling their child in an educational institution in Serbia. A total of 15.7% of respondents were undecided, while 25.3% stated that they did not have school-age children.

Among respondents who have school-age children, 37.1% would consider enrolling their child in an educational institution in Serbia, while 39.3% would consider their family leaving Kosovo if integration resulted in a decline in the quality of education or the loss of rights. A total of 21% would remain undecided, while only 2.7% would take no action.



Key Response Patterns

The findings show that Serbian-language educational institutions are extremely important to respondents and their families, while opposition to their integration into Kosovo's system is almost unanimous. Maintaining the status quo is by far the most acceptable scenario, and trust that Kosovo institutions would respect the rights of the Serb community in the event of integration is very low.

Opposition to integration is linked to broader distrust of its expected consequences. Respondents primarily point to risks to Serbia's curricula, the Serbian language, identity, and cultural content, recognition of diplomas in Serbia, and the possibility of Kosovo institutions influencing teaching content. The responses therefore express not only a position on the institutions' formal status, but also concern about continuity in the provision of education and the preservation of its key functions.

Respondents also associate the potential consequences of integration with specific family decisions. Among respondents who have school-age children, 74.7% state that they would not keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration. If the change resulted in a decline in the quality of education or the loss of rights, 37.1% of parents would consider enrolling their child in an educational institution in Serbia, and 39.3% would consider their family leaving Kosovo. These responses indicate a potential risk that a change in the status of educational institutions could produce consequences extending beyond the education sector itself.

The findings therefore indicate an almost complete absence of support for potential integration among respondents and a very low level of trust that the rights of the Serb community would be protected in such a process.

Kosovo's Legal Framework for Serbian-Language Education

Kosovo's legal framework contains a number of constitutional and statutory provisions concerning the organization of Serbian-language education. This chapter analyzes what these provisions establish with regard to the right to education and the use of the Serbian language, preservation of identity and community participation, the allocation of competencies between the central and municipal levels, the use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia, Serbian-language higher education, cooperation and financial ties with Serbia, and the use of educational qualifications.

The analysis in this chapter concerns the substance of the arrangements provided for by Kosovo's legal framework. In practice, no network of educational institutions providing Serbian-language instruction has been established under this framework. Serbian-language education is currently provided by the institutions operating within Serbia's education system described in the previous chapter. The provisions presented below should therefore be viewed as the legal framework for organizing Serbian-language education within Kosovo's system, rather than as a description of how such education is currently provided.

Right to Serbian-Language Education

The right to public education in Serbian in Kosovo is based primarily on its status as an official language. Article 5(1) of the Constitution establishes Albanian and Serbian as the official languages throughout Kosovo.[35] Article 2(1)-(2) of the Law on the Use of Languages further provides that Albanian and Serbian, together with their alphabets, have equal status in Kosovo institutions and that all persons have equal rights with regard to their use.[36] The same rule is confirmed by Article 4(1) of the Law on the Rights of Communities.[37]

The official status of the Serbian language applies to all central and municipal institutions. Its official status is not conditional on the size of the Serb community in a particular municipality. Unlike other community languages, which may acquire the status of an official language or a language in official use at the municipal level under the conditions set out in Article 2(3)-(4) of the Law on the Use of Languages, Serbian has official status in every municipality by virtue of the Constitution.

Article 59(2) of the Constitution and Article 8(1) of the Law on the Rights of Communities guarantee members of communities the right to public education at all levels in either official language of their choice. Since Serbian is an official language throughout Kosovo, the right to Serbian-language education does not depend on whether the Serb community constitutes the majority of the population in a particular municipality. Article 19(2) of the Law on the Use of Languages also defines this right as the individual right of every person to choose the preferred official language of instruction for themselves or their child.

[35] Constitution of Kosovo, consolidated text, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=97703.

[36] Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages, Official Gazette of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo, No. 10/2007, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2440&langid=2.

[37] Law No. 03/L-047 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and Their Members in Kosovo, consolidated text, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=100298.

Article 19(3) guarantees the right to enroll in a school in which instruction is provided in the chosen official language.

The right to education in Serbian as an official language should be distinguished from the right to education in a community language that is not official. Article 59(3) of the Constitution provides members of communities with the right to public preschool, primary, and secondary education in their own language, to the extent prescribed by law. Article 8(1) of the Law on the Rights of Communities specifies that this right also exists when the community language does not have official status.

These two legal bases should be distinguished. Serbian-language education derives primarily from Serbian's status as an official language and is guaranteed at all levels. The special right to education in a community language is relevant to communities whose mother tongue is not an official language and applies to preschool, primary, and secondary education. Serbian-language education therefore does not depend on this additional guarantee, although Serbian is also the language of the Serb community.

Availability of Serbian-Language Education

The right to Serbian-language education entails not only the possibility of choosing the language of instruction, but also an obligation on the competent institutions to make such education available. Article 19(4) of the Law on the Use of Languages provides that, where no school in a particular municipality offers instruction in the chosen official language, appropriate arrangements must be made to ensure that instruction is available in that language. Since Serbian has the status of an official language throughout Kosovo, this obligation applies to all municipalities.

This guarantee is supplemented by Article 12(1) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, under which municipalities are responsible for creating the conditions necessary to provide Serbian-language education.[38] The provision applies not only to Serb-majority municipalities, but to every municipality in which there is a need for such education.

The Law on Pre-University Education further regulates how access to instruction is ensured in practice.[39] Article 13(3) requires municipalities to provide education at ISCED levels 1, 2, and 3 in all languages of instruction within their territory, even when the number of pupils does not meet the minimum threshold established by secondary legislation. This provision applies to all languages of instruction, including Serbian. When instruction cannot be organized directly, the municipality must offer an appropriate alternative, including subsidized transportation to a location where education in that language is available. Article 13(2) of the same law allows municipalities to establish and maintain satellite classes for primary and lower secondary education in areas without a main school.

Article 59(3) of the Constitution and Article 8(1) of the Law on the Rights of Communities allow classes and schools to be established in community languages even when the number of pupils is below the usual minimum. If there are not enough pupils for instruction in a community language that is not official, Article 8(2) of the same law requires the Government to offer another arrangement, such as subsidized transportation, distance learning, mobile teaching, or accommodation in a school dormitory. Because

[38] Law No. 03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, consolidated text, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=106682.

[39] Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in Kosovo, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 17/2011, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2770&langid=2.

Serbian has official-language status, this provision is not the legal basis for the availability of Serbian-language instruction, but a special guarantee for communities whose languages do not have official status.

Use of Serbian in Education Administration and School Documents

The right to use Serbian in education is not limited to the language of instruction. It also covers communication by pupils, parents, employees, and educational institutions with central and municipal authorities, as well as the maintenance of school records and issuance of educational documents.

Article 4(1)-(2) of the Law on the Use of Languages provides for equality of the official languages in central institutions and for the right of every person to communicate with those institutions, receive their services, and obtain public documents in either official language. Article 4(5) provides that the official records and documents of central institutions must be maintained and issued in the official languages. These obligations also apply to the Ministry and other central authorities responsible for education.

At the municipal level, Article 7(1)-(2) of the same law establishes equality of the official languages in the work of municipal institutions and the right of citizens to communicate with municipal authorities and receive services and public documents from them in Serbian. Under Article 7(4), the official records, public registers, and other documents of municipal authorities are maintained and issued in the municipality's official languages. These rules also apply to municipal education directorates and other authorities that make decisions concerning educational institutions, pupils, and employees.

The right to use Serbian also applies to documents maintained and issued by educational institutions themselves. Article 24(1) of the Law on the Use of Languages gives pupils and their parents or guardians the right to decide in which official language the educational institution will maintain school records and issue reports. Article 24(2) authorizes the Ministry to establish the procedure for issuing school certificates in Kosovo's official languages.

This guarantee is supplemented by Article 5(3), item 3.2, of the Law on Pre-University Education, under which the official documents of educational institutions are issued in all official languages. For pupils educated in a language that is not official, documentation is additionally maintained and issued in the language of instruction. Because Serbian has official-language status, school records, reports, certificates, and other official educational documents must be maintained and issued in Serbian.

Substance and Scope of the Right

At the normative level, Serbian is recognized as an official language throughout Kosovo, and the legal framework guarantees the right to public education in Serbian at all levels. This right does not depend on the size of the Serb community in a particular municipality and should be distinguished from the special guarantees of education in community languages that do not have official-language status.

The legal framework also establishes obligations for the competent institutions regarding the availability of education in the chosen official language. These include creating the conditions for Serbian-language instruction, the possibility of organizing instruction even when the number of pupils does not meet the prescribed minimum, and providing alternative arrangements when instruction is not directly available.

The official status of Serbian also applies to education administration and includes the right to communicate with central and municipal authorities, the maintenance of relevant records, and the issuance of educational documents in Serbian.

Preservation of Identity and Community Participation in Education

The right to Serbian-language education is linked to the community's broader right to preserve and develop its identity. Article 57(3) of the Constitution guarantees members of communities the right to freely express, foster, and develop their identity and community attributes, while Article 58(1) requires the institutions to create appropriate conditions for their preservation, protection, and development.

These guarantees are given concrete effect in education legislation. Article 8(12) of the Law on the Rights of Communities provides that Kosovo's national curriculum must include the history, culture, and other attributes of communities traditionally present in Kosovo and that their representative organizations must be consulted during its development. Article 24(2) of the Law on Pre-University Education requires representatives of all communities to be included in developing and reviewing the Kosovo Curriculum Framework. Article 24(5), item 5.4, requires the curriculum framework to promote respect, understanding, and tolerance among communities, while paragraph 8 of the same article provides that it must enable pupils to expand their knowledge of their own identity, culture, and language and promote intercultural dialogue.

The preservation of identity and community participation is also linked to the composition of teaching and management staff. Article 8(8) of the Law on the Rights of Communities requires the Government, when planning teacher training, to ensure a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to teach in community languages. Teachers who will teach in a particular community language are trained in that language. The selection of candidates takes into account the need for instruction to be delivered by qualified persons who are fluent in the language concerned, preferably native speakers. Article 8(9) of the same law further requires that managers and teachers in public educational institutions operating in a community language be primarily members of that community and have full knowledge of its identity.

Community Participation in Governance and Decision-Making

Article 17(1) of the Law on Pre-University Education provides that every public educational institution must have a governing board. If a school is attended by pupils belonging to communities that are not the majority in the municipality, Article 17(2) requires the parent representatives to include at least one representative of those communities. Under Article 17(11), item 8, the governing board, acting on a proposal from the teachers, approves the list of textbooks and other teaching materials to be used by the school, in accordance with applicable legislation.

A special form of participation by the Serb community is provided for in the procedure for reviewing curricula and textbooks from Serbia. Under Article 12(4) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, if the Ministry objects to the use of a particular curriculum or textbook, the matter is referred to an independent commission to assess its compliance with the Constitution and applicable legislation. Under Article 13(1), in addition to representatives of the Ministry and a member selected by the Prime Minister, the commission includes three representatives selected by the Assembly from among members holding guaranteed seats for the Serb community.

Substance and Scope of the Right

Kosovo's legal framework links education in community languages to the preservation of community identity and participation in education decision-making. It provides for the inclusion of the history, culture, language, and other attributes of communities in educational content, the participation of community representatives in shaping the curriculum framework, and appropriate representation of community members among teaching and management staff.

Of additional importance to the Serb community is the participation of its representatives in the special procedure for reviewing curricula and textbooks from Serbia. At the individual school level, the legal framework also provides for the representation of parents from non-majority communities on the governing board.

Municipal Competencies in Education

Kosovo's pre-university education system is based on decentralized governance within a single central education framework. Kosovo's legal framework entrusts municipalities with the direct organization and administration of public preschool, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education, while central institutions regulate education policy, the legal framework, curriculum standards, teacher licensing, and quality assurance.

Municipal education responsibilities are own competencies of local self-government. Municipalities, however, do not exercise them independently of the central system, but in accordance with the laws, standards, criteria, procedures, and guidelines established by central institutions.

Central Framework of the Education System

Among other responsibilities, Article 3 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo entrusts the Ministry with developing education policy and legislation, establishing and administering the teacher licensing system, designing and overseeing education administration and school governance, and conducting education inspections.

These competencies are elaborated further in Article 5(1) of the Law on Pre-University Education, under which the Ministry has primary responsibility for planning, setting standards, and assuring the quality of pre-university education. Among other responsibilities, the Ministry develops education policy and legislation, establishes outcomes for different levels of education and regulates the awarding of qualifications, sets criteria and administers the teacher licensing system, and determines the forms of administration and governance of educational institutions. Under Article 7(2) of the same law, the Ministry monitors the exercise of municipal education competencies to ensure the implementation of applicable legislation, while Article 8(1)-(2) entrusts education inspections to the Ministry's inspection body, with which municipalities and educational institutions are required to cooperate.

The central level is not responsible for the institutions' day-to-day management, but establishes the framework within which all schools operate. That framework includes common education policy, curriculum, standards, qualifications, licenses, governance procedures, external evaluation, and inspection oversight.

Own Competencies of Municipalities

Article 17(h) of the Law on Local Self-Government designates the provision of public preschool, primary, and secondary education as an own competency of municipalities. It includes the registration and licensing of educational institutions, employment of teaching and administrative staff, payment of salaries, and professional training of employees, subject to the standards established by applicable legislation.

Article 4(1) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo confirms that municipalities have full and exclusive competencies in matters of local interest relating to public preschool, primary, and secondary education. At the same time, the same provision expressly requires municipalities to comply with the standards established by applicable legislation.

Article 5 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo specifies the operational competencies of municipalities at levels 0, 1, 2, and 3 of public education. Municipalities exercise these competencies in accordance with the guidelines, procedures, and general standards established by the Ministry. They include:

- construction of school facilities;
- registration and admission of pupils;
- employment of teachers and other school staff in accordance with statutory procedures;
- selection of principals and deputy principals in accordance with statutory employment procedures and criteria established by the Ministry;
- payment of management and other staff;
- training of teaching and other professional staff in accordance with the Ministry's guidelines and standards;
- oversight of the education process in accordance with the Ministry's guidelines.

These competencies belong to all municipalities in Kosovo. Serb-majority municipalities therefore do not have enhanced education competencies in pre-university education, but the same own competencies that the law grants to all municipalities.

Allocation of Central and Municipal Competencies

The allocation of competencies is particularly evident in the areas of teacher employment and licensing. Under Article 10 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, the Ministry establishes a central teacher licensing system, while municipalities employ teachers who meet the statutory requirements and hold the appropriate license. Municipalities therefore select and employ teaching staff, but may not independently determine the professional and other requirements that candidates must meet.

A similar allocation applies to the licensing of public educational institutions. Under Article 11(1) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, public educational institutions are licensed by the municipality. The Ministry, however, issues a written opinion on licensing, after which the municipality adopts an administrative decision granting, denying, or revoking the license. If the municipality's decision differs from the Ministry's opinion, the municipality must provide a detailed explanation of the reasons for the departure. If the municipality fails to decide within the statutory time limit, the Ministry's opinion is deemed the final decision.

These examples show that the central and municipal levels do not have entirely separate spheres of action. The central level establishes the rules, criteria, and standards and monitors their implementation, while municipalities directly create the conditions necessary to provide education.

Intermunicipal Cooperation in Education

Municipalities may jointly perform certain tasks within their competencies. Articles 28 and 29 of the Law on Local Self-Government allow municipalities to establish partnerships to perform functions of common interest and to exercise their own and enhanced competencies through such partnerships. These partnerships may have joint bodies, administrative and advisory staff, and joint financial arrangements.

The Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation regulates the forms of such cooperation in greater detail.[40] Under Article 9 of the Law, municipalities may establish joint working groups, administrative bodies, and

[40] Law No. 04/L-010 on Inter-Municipal Cooperation, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 7/2011, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2749&langid=2.

public institutions, while Article 13 expressly permits the establishment of joint public institutions in the field of education. Intermunicipal cooperation allows municipalities to jointly perform certain tasks, establish joint structures, and entrust the performance of specific tasks, while retaining legal responsibility for their competencies and for the operation of the structures established.

The Law therefore provides legal forms through which two or more municipalities may jointly perform certain education tasks, establish a joint administrative structure, or establish a joint public institution. Intermunicipal cooperation, however, remains a form of jointly exercising existing municipal competencies. It does not, in itself, establish a separate education system, transfer new competencies to the joint structure, or exempt education from the central legislative, curricular, and quality assurance systems.

Municipal Competencies and Serbian-Language Education

Article 12(1) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo provides that municipalities are responsible for creating the conditions necessary to provide Serbian-language education. This provision applies to all municipalities and does not limit this competency to municipalities in which the Serb community is the majority. Every municipality has an obligation to create the conditions for Serbian-language instruction where there is a need for it. This is consistent with the official status of Serbian and the right of pupils to choose Serbian as the language of public education, irrespective of the municipality's ethnic composition.

For this purpose, Serb-majority municipalities use the general pre-university education competencies that the law grants to all municipalities. They may organize the public school network, provide school facilities, employ teachers and other staff, and select principals and deputy principals in accordance with the prescribed procedures. These competencies do not constitute a special regime for Serb-majority municipalities, but are the means by which those municipalities ensure the availability of Serbian-language education within the central legislation, curriculum, licensing standards, evaluation, and inspection oversight framework.

Enhanced Higher Education Competency of North Mitrovica

The general pre-university competencies of all municipalities should be distinguished from the enhanced competencies that certain municipalities have in specific areas. In education, the only specifically established enhanced municipal competency concerns higher education in North Mitrovica. Article 21 of the Law on Local Self-Government assigns North Mitrovica competency for higher education, including the registration and licensing of institutions, employment, payment of salaries, and training of teaching and administrative staff.[41]

This enhanced competency is regulated in greater detail by Article 14 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo. It designates the University in North Mitrovica as an autonomous public higher education institution and gives the municipality competencies in relation to the Serbian-language university. The provision stipulates that the municipality appoints some members of its governing board, is required to provide appropriate facilities and funding, and may cooperate with other municipalities in managing the University.

[41] Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 28/2008, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2530&langid=2.

This enhanced competency is also not separate from the central legal system. The University's statute, accreditation, financing, and other operational matters must comply with the central legislative framework, while, under Article 19(2) of the Law on Local Self-Government, central institutions monitor the exercise of enhanced competencies in accordance with minimum standards, professional qualifications, and licensing and accreditation rules.

Substance and Scope of the Competencies

The legal framework establishes a decentralized but unified pre-university education system. Municipalities have broad own competencies and directly manage public educational institutions, personnel, infrastructure, school administration, and the provision of education. They exercise these competencies, however, within the common legal, curricular, and quality framework established by central institutions.

This allocation of competencies means:

- that central institutions establish education policy, curricula, standards, qualifications, and assessment criteria, as well as the system of teacher licensing, external evaluation, and inspection oversight;
- that municipalities directly organize and administer public pre-university education and manage school facilities, personnel, salaries, and local education administration;
- that all municipalities exercise their competencies in accordance with central legislation, procedures, and standards;
- that municipalities may jointly perform certain education tasks, establish joint administrative structures, and establish joint public institutions, while retaining responsibility for the exercise of their competencies;
- that all municipalities, not only Serb-majority municipalities, are responsible for creating the conditions necessary to provide Serbian-language education;
- that, in addition to the general competencies belonging to all municipalities, North Mitrovica also has an enhanced competency in higher education.

Serb-majority municipalities therefore do not have a special legal regime in pre-university education. They use the general competencies belonging to all municipalities to organize Serbian-language education in the communities where the need for it is greatest. In exercising those competencies, they may cooperate with other municipalities, but intermunicipal cooperation does not create new competencies or remove education from the common central framework. A special regime exists only for North Mitrovica and applies to higher education, not pre-university education.

Right to Establish Private Educational Institutions

Article 59(4) of the Constitution guarantees members of communities the right to establish and manage private educational and training institutions. The same provision allows such institutions to receive financial assistance from public funds. Article 8(4) of the Law on the Rights of Communities confirms this right and provides that private community institutions may apply for accreditation if they meet the general education and curriculum standards, while the Ministry monitors the quality of instruction.

The right to mother-tongue education in private institutions is confirmed by Article 22 of the Law on the Use of Languages. Paragraph 1 guarantees the right to establish private educational institutions in which instruction is provided in the mother tongue, while paragraph 2 entrusts the Ministry with regulating the procedure for their registration.

In pre-university education, this right is exercised within the general licensing and oversight system. Article 44 of the Law on Pre-University Education recognizes a child's right to attend a licensed private educational institution and allows such institutions to be established by legal entities registered in Kosovo, citizens of Kosovo, or groups of citizens.

Under Article 46 of the same law, a private institution providing pre-university education must be licensed by the Ministry. Licensing conditions concern, among other matters, premises and equipment, the number and qualifications of teachers, and the education program. The institution applies the Kosovo Curriculum Framework or an external curriculum recognized by the Ministry. It may begin operating only after obtaining a Ministry license and a municipal business license, and its work is subject to education inspection.

Article 11(2) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo confirms this allocation of competencies. A municipality issues a business license to a private educational institution only after the institution provides evidence that it has been registered and licensed as an educational institution by the Ministry.

Substance and Scope of the Right

The legal framework recognizes the right of community members to establish and manage private educational institutions that provide instruction in their language. This right includes the independent establishment and management of institutions, but does not exempt them from the common education system. To provide recognized pre-university education, private institutions must be registered and licensed, meet the prescribed requirements concerning staff, premises, and education programs, and be subject to Ministry oversight. Financial support from public funds is permitted, but is not automatically guaranteed to every institution established.

Right to Use Curricula and Textbooks from Serbia

Kosovo legislation provides that schools teaching in Serbian may use curricula and textbooks prepared by Serbia's Ministry of Education. Article 8(5) of the Law on the Rights of Communities recognizes this possibility and refers to the procedure regulated by the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo.

Under Article 12(2)-(3) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo, before using such teaching materials, a school must notify the Kosovo ministry responsible for education. The Ministry then has three months to review the submitted material and raise any objection. If no objection is raised within that period, the curriculum or textbook may be used for instruction.

If an objection is raised, Article 12(4) provides that the matter must be referred to an independent commission, which assesses whether the disputed material complies with the Constitution and applicable legislation. The material may not be used until the commission issues its decision.

Under Article 13(1) of the Law, the independent commission has seven members:

- three representatives of the Ministry;
- three representatives selected by the Assembly from among members holding guaranteed seats for the Serb community;
- one member selected by the Prime Minister.[42]

The commission decides by majority vote, in accordance with Article 13(2). Under paragraph 3 of the same article, the chair rotates annually between a representative selected by the members holding guaranteed seats for the Serb community and a representative of the Ministry.

Substance and Scope of the Right

The legal framework allows schools teaching in Serbian to use curricula and textbooks from Serbia. Their use is not conditional on prior Ministry approval, but is governed by a special notification procedure.

These provisions constitute a special legal arrangement for preserving the substantive connection between Serbian-language education and Serbia's education system. The use of curricula and materials from Serbia is not conditional on the Ministry's prior express approval, but remains subject to a notification procedure and a review of their compliance with Kosovo's constitutional and statutory framework.

Right to Serbian-Language Higher Education

Article 59(2) of the Constitution guarantees members of communities the right to public education at all levels in either official language of their choice. Since Serbian has official-language status, this guarantee also covers public higher education in Serbian. Article 23(1) of the Law on the Use of Languages designates the official languages as the primary languages of instruction at public universities. Under paragraphs 2-4 of the same article, public universities further regulate, through their own acts, the use of official and other languages in the delivery of study programs, teacher education, and university administration.

Article 8(3) of the Law on the Rights of Communities further provides for the preservation of existing opportunities for professional and university education in community languages. Article 8(11) of the same law guarantees members of communities equal access to university education and allows special measures to facilitate the admission of candidates from community schools.

Special Status of the University in North Mitrovica

In addition to the general right to public higher education in Serbian, Kosovo legislation provides a special institutional model for a Serbian-language public university. Article 8(6) of the Law on the Rights of Communities designates the University in North Mitrovica as an autonomous Serbian-language public

[42] The original text of Law No. 03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo provided that the seventh member of the commission would be selected by the International Civilian Representative. Law No. 04/L-115 Amending and Supplementing Laws Related to the Ending of International Supervision of Kosovo's Independence amended this provision so that the seventh member is selected by the Prime Minister. Law No. 04/L-115, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 25/2012, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2840.

higher education institution under the competency of the Municipality of North Mitrovica.[43] Article 14(a) and (d) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo confirms this status and expressly authorizes the Municipality of North Mitrovica to assume responsibility for this Serbian-language public university in accordance with applicable legislation.

Article 21 of the Law on Local Self-Government grants North Mitrovica enhanced competency in higher education. It includes responsibilities relating to the registration and licensing of educational institutions, employment of teaching and administrative staff, payment of salaries, and professional training of employees. This is a special enhanced education competency of North Mitrovica and applies to higher education.

Article 14 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo regulates the relationship between the University's autonomy and the central framework. The University adopts a statute regulating its internal organization, governance, procedures, and relations with public authorities, but the statute must comply with the central framework legislation. Compliance is reviewed by a special seven-member commission, which also considers issues relating to the University's accreditation within Kosovo's higher education system.

Under the current text of the Law, following the 2012 amendment, the commission comprises three representatives of the Ministry, three representatives of the University, and one member selected by the Prime Minister. The commission decides by majority vote, and the chair rotates annually between representatives of the University and the Ministry. This composition ensures the direct participation of the University and central education institutions, but decisions are made by the commission as a whole. Article 14(e) provides that the University's Governing Board has nine members. The municipality appoints two members, five are selected by the faculties and the student body, and the procedure for selecting the remaining two is regulated by the statute.

Article 14(f)-(h) regulates financing and intermunicipal cooperation. The Municipality of North Mitrovica is required to provide appropriate facilities and finance the University from Kosovo's budget and other institutional sources. Financing from Serbia is also permitted, provided that it is transparent, publicly disclosed, and compliant with Kosovo legislation. North Mitrovica may cooperate with other municipalities in carrying out its responsibilities toward the University.

Accreditation and Licensing of the University

The special status of the University in North Mitrovica does not exempt it from the general higher education accreditation and licensing system. Article 14 of the Law on Higher Education regulates the licensing of higher education institutions and the relationship between licensing and accreditation.[44] Article 15 regulates accreditation, evaluation, and quality assurance, while Article 16 provides that an accredited institution may issue only the diplomas and academic titles covered by its accreditation.

These rules are further regulated by Article 25 of the Law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, under which institutional and program accreditation or validation, as well as a Ministry license, are prerequisites

[43] Kosovo's legal framework uses the name "University in North Mitrovica" for this higher education institution, while its official name within Serbia's education system is "University of Pristina with its temporary seat in North Mitrovica." The name corresponding to the relevant legal or institutional context is used below.

[44] Law No. 04/L-037 on Higher Education in Kosovo, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 14/2011, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2761.

for delivering study programs and conducting academic activities.[45] The same provision stipulates that only an accredited higher education institution may issue the diplomas and titles specified in the accreditation decision. Article 46 further provides that a higher education institution may not begin operating without institutional and program accreditation and the appropriate Ministry license.

The special commission provided for by Article 14 of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo allows the University and central institutions to participate in reviewing its statute and accreditation matters. It does not replace the regular accreditation and licensing procedures, but constitutes an additional mechanism linked to the University's special institutional status.

Substance and Scope of the Right

The legal framework establishes two interconnected levels of protection. The first is the general right of community members to public higher education in either official language of their choice, which includes Serbian-language education. The second is the special institutional guarantee of an autonomous Serbian-language public university in North Mitrovica.

The University's special status encompasses its institutional autonomy, the enhanced competency of the Municipality of North Mitrovica, the University's participation in reviewing its statute and accreditation matters, representation of the academic community in governance, and the possibility of financing from multiple institutional sources.

This autonomy, however, is not unlimited. The University's statute and operations must comply with central legislation, while institutional accreditation, accreditation of study programs, and a Ministry license are conditions for conducting academic activities within Kosovo's system. The University could issue only the diplomas and academic titles covered by a valid accreditation decision.

Kosovo's legal framework therefore regulates more than the possibility of delivering individual study programs in Serbian. It defines a special legal status for a Serbian-language public university in North Mitrovica. That status includes certain elements of autonomy and the enhanced competency of the Municipality of North Mitrovica, while simultaneously linking the University to the central accreditation, licensing, and quality assurance system.

Cooperation with Institutions in Serbia and Financing from Serbia

Kosovo's legal framework provides that municipalities may cooperate, within their areas of competency, with municipalities, institutions, and state authorities in Serbia, and may receive financial assistance from Serbia. Cooperation is regulated by agreement and is subject to legality review, while the receipt and use of financial assistance are governed by the rules on municipal and public finances.

Cooperation with Institutions in Serbia

Article 30(2) of the Law on Local Self-Government expressly allows municipalities, within their areas of competency, to cooperate with municipalities and institutions in Serbia, including state agencies. Cooperation may include financial and technical assistance, engagement of professional staff, and provision of the equipment necessary for the exercise of municipal competencies. Since public preschool,

[45] Law No. 08/L-110 on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 13/2023, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=76045.

primary, and secondary education is an own competency of municipalities, this possibility also applies to education.

Article 4(3) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo specifically confirms that municipalities may cooperate, within their education competencies, with other municipalities and authorities, including municipalities, institutions, and state agencies in Serbia.

The right to cooperate is not unlimited. Under Article 30(3)-(6) of the Law on Local Self-Government, a municipality must notify the ministry responsible for local self-government and submit a draft agreement. The agreement should specify the areas and objectives of cooperation, arrangements for engaging personnel and equipment, and financial arrangements. The competent ministry may require amendments or suspend cooperation if an identified violation of the law cannot be remedied, while the municipality may challenge such a decision before a court.

Financial Assistance from Serbia

Article 7(1) of the Law on Local Government Finance expressly identifies financial assistance from Serbia as a potential source of municipal financing.[46] Under paragraph 2 of the same article, municipalities manage these funds in accordance with public financial management rules.

This regime is regulated in greater detail by Article 59 of the Law on Public Financial Management and Accountability, which establishes that municipalities are entitled to receive financial assistance from Serbia.[47] These funds are treated as earmarked municipal revenue and may be used only for purposes directly related to the exercise of municipal competencies. Since education is an own municipal competency, the funds may also be used for needs related to its exercise.

The funds must be deposited into the official municipal account or an account with a commercial bank certified by the Central Bank of Kosovo and recorded in the Treasury accounting system. If funds are received through an account with a commercial bank, the municipality is required to report such receipts and their use to the Treasury.

Financial assistance from Serbia is not taken into account when determining regular grants and other budget allocations to a municipality. Its receipt therefore does not constitute grounds for reducing the funds that the municipality receives from Kosovo's budget.

A special rule also applies to the University in North Mitrovica. Article 14(f) of the Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo requires the municipality to ensure that the University receives adequate premises and funding. Financing from Serbia is permitted, but must be transparent and publicly available in accordance with Kosovo law.

Cooperation and assistance from Serbia do not replace the regular financing of education from Kosovo's budget. Article 23 of the Law on Local Government Finance provides that municipalities receive operating grants, including a specific education grant. Under Article 25, this grant is intended to finance the minimum standard of preschool, primary, and secondary education. The amount of the grant is determined according to a formula established by the Grants Commission, based on the number of pupils

[46] Law No. 03/L-049 on Local Government Finance, consolidated text, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=107375.

[47] Law No. 03/L-048 on Public Financial Management and Accountability, consolidated text, Official Gazette of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=119140.

and other criteria, with particular consideration given to the needs of pupils from non-majority communities.

Substance and Scope of the Right

The legal framework allows municipalities to cooperate in education with municipalities and agencies in Serbia and to receive financial, technical, personnel, and material assistance from Serbia.

These provisions legally recognize the possibility of institutional and financial ties with Serbia, but place them within the framework of Kosovo's municipal competencies, public finance rules, and central review of legality.

Recognition and Verification of Diplomas and Qualifications

Kosovo's legal framework provides several procedures through which educational documents obtained outside Kosovo's regular education system may be used before Kosovo institutions. Of particular relevance to Serbian-language education are the general procedure for recognizing higher education qualifications obtained outside Kosovo, the special procedure for accepting qualifications obtained in Serbia, and the verification of diplomas issued by institutions operating in Kosovo under Serbia's education system.

The general procedure is regulated in greater detail by Administrative Instruction No. 16/2016, which establishes the principles and procedures for recognizing diplomas, academic degrees, and qualifications from higher professional schools and universities obtained outside Kosovo.[48] A separate Administrative Instruction No. 09/2015 was adopted for diplomas from higher professional schools and university degrees obtained in Serbia, regulating the procedure for their acceptance in Kosovo's legal system.[49]

These procedures concern the recognition or acceptance of higher education qualifications for academic or professional purposes. They should be distinguished from verification of diplomas issued by educational institutions operating in Kosovo under Serbia's education system.

Verification of Diplomas Issued by the University in North Mitrovica

A special procedure for issuing validity certificates has been established for diplomas issued by the University in North Mitrovica. Regulation No. 21/2015 defines this procedure as a temporary affirmative measure intended to give diploma holders equal access to employment and contribute to equitable representation in public sector institutions.[50] The provisions of the Regulation are binding on all public institutions.

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[48] Administrative Instruction (MEST) No. 16/2016 on the Principles and Procedures for the Recognition of Diplomas, Academic Degrees, and Qualifications from Higher Professional Schools and Universities Obtained Outside Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=15228.

[49] Administrative Instruction (MEST) No. 09/2015 on the Principles and Procedures for the Acceptance of Diplomas from Higher Professional Schools and University Degrees Obtained in Serbia, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=15030.

[50] Regulation (Government of Kosovo) No. 21/2015 on the Procedures and Criteria for Issuing Certificates to Citizens of Kosovo Who Graduated from the University in North Mitrovica for the Purpose of Applying for Employment, Obtaining Professional Licenses, and Taking Professional Examinations at Public Institutions, https://kryeministri.rks-

A validity certificate allows the diploma to be used for:

- applying for employment in public institutions;
- obtaining professional licenses issued by public institutions;
- taking professional examinations organized by public institutions.

The procedure covers diplomas issued by the University since its seat was relocated to Mitrovica in 2001. Certificate holders are guaranteed equal treatment in the specified procedures, but this does not remove the general requirements concerning professional qualifications, competence, merit, and the conduct of an open competition.

Applications are decided by the Diploma Verification Commission. Under Article 18 of the Regulation, the Commission verifies the completeness of the application and accompanying documentation and the authenticity of the educational documents. It issues a decision within 30 days and, if the decision is positive, issues a validity certificate. A decision of the Commission may be appealed before the competent court within 15 working days.

The certificate does not have the effect of general academic recognition for all purposes, but allows the diploma to be used for the purposes expressly established by the Regulation. The certificate template also states that it remains valid until the University is accredited and licensed in accordance with applicable legislation.

In higher education, this mechanism is limited to diplomas issued by the University in North Mitrovica. Diplomas issued by the Academy of Applied Studies based in Leposavic are not covered, and their holders therefore cannot have them verified under this special procedure.

Verification of Serbian-Language Secondary School Diplomas

The Commission's mandate was subsequently extended to diplomas issued in Kosovo by secondary schools following Serbia's curriculum. In its 2024 Kosovo Report, the European Commission noted the extension of the Commission's mandate to this category of diplomas.[51] Kosovo's official sources also confirm that applications to verify Serbian-language secondary school diplomas, as well as diplomas issued by the University in North Mitrovica, may be submitted through the e-Kosova platform.[52]

Through this procedure, Kosovo institutions enable the review and confirmation of diplomas issued by secondary schools operating in Kosovo under Serbia's education system. In this instance as well, verification of a diploma should be distinguished from its automatic and unrestricted recognition for every academic or professional purpose. The scope of the certificate issued depends on the rules and the procedure in which the diploma is used.

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[51] European Commission, Kosovo 2024 Report, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c790738e-4cf6-4a43-a8a9-43c1b6f01e10_en?filename=Kosovo+Report+2024.pdf.

[52] Office for Community Affairs, "Applications for the Verification of Secondary School and University Diplomas Can Also Be Submitted Through the e-Kosova Platform," https://zck-kpz-platform.rks-gov.net/sr/obevestenje-apliciranje-za-verifikaciju-diploma-srednjih-skola-i-univerzitetskih-diploma-je-omoguceno-i-preko-platforme-e-kosova/.

Current Status of the Commission

The Commission was reestablished by a Government decision of February 2023, after which its composition and mandate were amended and extended several times. Under the most recent Government decision available at the time this analysis was written, the Commission's mandate was extended for the period from June 22 to September 22, 2026.[53]

In its current form, the mechanism operates on the basis of the Commission's time-limited mandate, which the Government periodically extends. This distinguishes it from the general system of academic and professional recognition, which is permanently regulated by the Law on Higher Education and the relevant administrative instructions.

Substance and Scope of Recognition and Verification

The legal framework provides for two interconnected but distinct mechanisms:

- recognition of higher education qualifications obtained outside Kosovo, including the special procedure for accepting diplomas and university degrees obtained in Serbia;
- verification of diplomas issued by the University in North Mitrovica and by secondary schools operating in Kosovo under Serbia's curriculum.

These mechanisms do not have the same legal effect. Recognition or acceptance of a higher education qualification allows it to be used within Kosovo's system for academic or professional purposes, subject to the conditions of the relevant procedure. Verification confirms the validity of specific diplomas and allows them to be used for prescribed purposes, but does not necessarily, in itself, constitute general recognition for further education, employment, and all regulated professions.

Synthesis of the Legal Framework

Viewed as a whole, Kosovo's legal framework contains detailed provisions on the organization of Serbian-language education within Kosovo's education system. Serbian is defined as an official language throughout Kosovo, and the right to public education in Serbian is recognized at all levels. The legal framework also establishes institutional obligations regarding the availability of instruction, the use of Serbian in education administration, the preservation of community identity, and community participation in certain decision-making processes.

In pre-university education, the statutory model is based on an allocation of responsibilities between central institutions and municipalities. The central level defines education policy, curriculum and other standards, teacher licensing, quality assurance, and inspection oversight, while municipalities are entrusted with organizing and managing public preschool, primary, and secondary education. The legal framework also provides for intermunicipal cooperation, but as a means of jointly exercising existing municipal competencies, not as a separate education system outside the central framework.

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[53] The Commission was established by Government Decision No. 11/130 of February 22, 2023, and its mandate was subsequently amended and extended several times. Under the most recent available Government Decision No. 05/24 of June 19, 2026, the Commission's mandate was extended from June 22 to September 22, 2026. Government of Kosovo, "Decisions of the 24th Meeting of the Government" (Vendimet e mbledhjes së 24-të të Qeverisë), Decision No. 05/24, https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Vendimet-e-mbledhjes-se-24-te-te-Qeverise.pdf.

Certain special arrangements are also provided for Serbian-language education. Schools may use curricula and textbooks from Serbia through a special notification procedure and, where applicable, a review of their compliance with Kosovo law. In higher education, the law defines a special status for a Serbian-language public university in North Mitrovica, with enhanced municipal competencies, but within Kosovo's accreditation, licensing, and quality assurance system. Kosovo's legal framework also allows municipalities to cooperate with institutions in Serbia and receive financial assistance from Serbia. It further defines recognition, acceptance, and verification procedures that enable individual qualifications obtained in Serbia or at institutions operating in Kosovo under Serbia's education system to be used.

Kosovo's legal framework for Serbian-language education, however, differs from the situation on the ground. The Serbian-language education system in Kosovo already operates as a separately organized and interconnected whole within Serbia's education system. Its institutions have pupils and students, employees, records, curricula, qualifications, financing, and institutional and international links that were established and developed outside Kosovo's education system. The existence of Kosovo provisions on Serbian-language education therefore does not mean that they legally encompass the system currently providing those services.

The fundamental distinction is therefore not between the existence and absence of a right to Serbian-language education. Kosovo's legal framework defines such a right and regulates the conditions for organizing it. The remaining question concerns its scope in relation to a system that was not established under these provisions and already operates within a different legal and institutional framework. This distinction provides the starting point for analyzing the limits of the existing legal framework in the next chapter.

Limits of the Existing Legal Framework: Absence of a Legal and Institutional Transition Regime

The preceding analysis shows that Kosovo's legal framework regulates a number of issues relevant to the organization of Serbian-language education within Kosovo's education system. Its limits, however, become apparent when considering whether that framework can be applied to a change in the status of an education system that already exists and operates within another legal and institutional framework.

This chapter does not assume that integration will take place, nor does it consider how it should be implemented. Its purpose is to examine the relationship between Kosovo's existing legal framework and the preconditions that would be required for a potential change in the status of the Serbian-language education system in Kosovo. The issues considered below therefore do not constitute a prediction of specific consequences of potential integration, but identify situations for which the applicable legal framework contains no predetermined rules.

Serbian-language educational institutions in Kosovo are not institutions that have yet to be established and begin providing education. They already operate within Serbia's education system, have pupils, students, and employees, apply curricula, organize instruction and examinations, maintain records, issue educational documents, and are connected through common programs and education cycles.

Kosovo's existing legal framework regulates the regular establishment and operation of educational institutions within Kosovo's system, but was not designed to govern the transfer of an established education system from one legal and institutional framework to another. This gap is the subject of the analysis that follows.

Relationship Between the Applicable Legal Framework and the Existing Education System

Regular establishment, registration, licensing, and accreditation procedures determine the conditions under which an educational institution may acquire the appropriate status to provide education within Kosovo's system. They regulate the founder and legal status of the institution, compliance with premises, staffing, program, and other requirements, the authority responsible for licensing or accreditation, and the conditions governing its future operations. Such procedures do not regulate the legal consequences of changing the status of an institution that already exists and provides education within another system. Nor do they define the legal status of pupils and students already enrolled, recognition of grades already completed and examinations passed, existing records and previously issued documents, employees' existing employment relationships, or the institutions' governance and financing arrangements.

The absence of rules for this type of change in status therefore cannot be reduced to the need to adopt several pieces of secondary legislation. The applicable legal framework does not contain a comprehensive regime governing the relationship between the institutions' existing and potential new status and the legal consequences of changing the system within which they operate. The basic rules of such a transition would require special statutory regulation, supported by appropriate secondary legislation. In the absence of such a regime, the applicable legal framework does not provide a uniform answer to questions concerning the legal status of existing institutions and their relationship to potential new legal entities, continuity in the provision of education, continuation of pupils' and students' education, the validity of grades already completed, examinations passed, and credits earned, the transfer of school and student records, the legal effect of previously issued documents, the continuity of employees' established employment relationships, and other matters.

These issues concern the system as a whole and cannot be regulated solely through a series of separate decisions on individual institutions. A decision to establish or license one school, employ its staff, or recognize an individual educational document cannot establish general rules that would apply simultaneously to all institutions, pupils, students, employees, and records covered by the change in status. Individual procedures do not establish legal continuity for the education system as a whole.

Educational Progression, Records, and Qualifications

One issue that the ordinary legal framework does not address concerns educational progression. At the time of a potential change in status, pupils and students would be at different stages of their education. In such a situation, questions would remain undefined regarding the validity of grades already completed, examinations passed, credits earned, and educational documents issued, as well as the conditions under which pupils and students could continue the education they had begun.

This issue is further complicated by differences in the structures of the two education systems. In Serbia's system, primary education lasts eight years and is organized into two cycles of four grades each. At the end of the eighth grade, pupils take a final examination, after which they may continue into secondary education.[54] Kosovo's pre-university system distinguishes between five-year primary education and four-year lower secondary education, meaning that compulsory education covers a total of nine grades. Differences in the duration of compulsory education and the structure of education cycles would raise questions about the grade and education cycle in which a pupil would be placed, how previously completed grades and curricula would be assessed, and how pupils transitioning between primary and secondary education at the time of the change in status would be treated.

A similar issue exists in higher education. The applicable framework contains no special rules on how examinations already passed and ECTS credits already earned would be treated in the event of a change in status, how they would be aligned with study programs accredited in another system, and under what conditions students would continue the studies they had begun. Continuity of education cannot be reduced to the formal enrollment of students in an institution whose status has changed.

Educational progression is directly linked to the handling of school and student records and educational documents that record grades completed, examinations passed, credits earned, and qualifications obtained. The applicable framework does not regulate the collective transfer of existing records or the legal effect of previously recorded data and issued documents.

Existing mechanisms for the individual recognition, acceptance, or verification of a diploma enable its use in a specific case and for specified purposes, but do not constitute accreditation or licensing of the institution or of the education or study program under which the diploma was obtained. Such a procedure does not regulate the relationship between the previous and future education programs and does not, in itself, ensure continuity of an education pathway already begun.

[54] Law on Primary Education and Upbringing, Official Gazette of Serbia, Nos. 55/2013, 101/2017, 10/2019, 27/2018, other law, 129/2021, 92/2023, and 19/2025, https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2013/55/1/reg.

Status of Employees, Governance, and Financing

A similar gap exists regarding the status of employees. Teachers, professional associates, administrative staff, and other personnel already have established employment relationships within Serbia's system. The regular employment procedures regulated by Kosovo's legal framework concern the establishment of an employment relationship within that system. They do not regulate the continuity of previously established employment relationships or determine how prior service, professional qualifications and licenses, salaries, social and pension insurance, and other rights and obligations would be treated in the event of a change in status.

The applicable framework also contains no special rules on continuity of governance during a change in status. Existing schools and the University have governance and management bodies established under Serbia's regulations, while Kosovo's legal framework defines procedures for selecting and appointing the bodies of educational institutions within Kosovo's system. The ordinary rules do not determine the relationship between existing and potential new bodies, the legal effect of decisions previously adopted, or the manner in which rights, obligations, and responsibilities would be transferred.

Financing is another area in which the existing legal framework regulates the system's regular operation, but not the transition from one established regime to another. The existing Serbian-language education system is financed through Serbia's institutions, while Kosovo's legal framework provides for financing public education through Kosovo's budget system and permits certain forms of financial assistance from Serbia. The applicable rules do not regulate a potential transition between these regimes, the continuity of salary payments and other regular expenditures, financing of facilities and the teaching process, or the treatment of obligations incurred before the change in status.

Limits of Existing Legal Mechanisms

The existence of individual legal mechanisms relevant to Serbian-language education does not fill this legal gap. Municipal competencies, intermunicipal cooperation, the use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia, the possibility of financial assistance from Serbia, the special status of the University in North Mitrovica, and diploma recognition and verification procedures regulate different issues within Kosovo's existing legal framework. None was designed as a mechanism for transitioning an existing education system.

Intermunicipal cooperation regulates the joint performance of specific tasks within municipal competencies, but does not entail changing the status of existing educational institutions. The use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia regulates a particular aspect of the teaching process, but does not guarantee continuity of school operations. Financial assistance from Serbia is a permitted source of financing within the framework of municipal competencies, but does not regulate the transition from the existing financing regime to a new one.

Procedures for recognizing, accepting, and verifying qualifications concern the use of individual educational documents for specified academic or professional purposes. They do not constitute a procedure governing the legal effect of previously achieved education outcomes for all pupils and students.

The special legal status of the University in North Mitrovica regulates how Kosovo's legal framework defines a Serbian-language public university within Kosovo's system. It does not regulate the legal continuity of the University that currently operates within Serbia's education system, the status of existing

students and employees, previously completed study requirements, existing records and qualifications, or the continuity of international projects, agreements, and memberships

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Scope of the Legal Framework in Relation to the Existing System

The fundamental limit of the existing legal framework is not that Kosovo's legal framework fails to recognize Serbian-language education. The preceding analysis shows that it regulates a range of rights, competencies, and procedures relevant to its organization. The limit lies in the fact that it does not regulate a change in the status of a system that already exists and operates within another legal and institutional framework.

A potential change in the status of Serbian-language educational institutions therefore could not be reduced to applying the existing establishment, registration, licensing, and accreditation rules or to elaborating them technically through several pieces of secondary legislation. The existing framework does not contain a comprehensive legal regime governing the legal consequences that a change in institutional status would have for pupils, students, employees, records, qualifications, governance, and financing. The ordinary rules determine the conditions under which an institution may provide education within Kosovo's system. This does not, in itself, guarantee continuity of pupils' and students' education, the legal effect of institutional records and documents, or the continuity of employees' established legal relationships.

The existing system operates within Serbia's education system and is connected to its institutions through curricula, records, qualifications, financing, and employment relationships. Kosovo's legal framework regulates how Serbian-language education may be organized within Kosovo's system, but does not contain a regime governing a change in the status of an education system already operating within Serbia's system while preserving continuity of education and established legal relationships. Certain issues produce legal, educational, or financial effects in both systems and could not be fully regulated solely through acts of Kosovo institutions. The relevance of agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue to education for the Serb community in Kosovo is examined in the next chapter.

Relevance of Dialogue Agreements for Serbian-Language Education

Serbian-language education is not regulated by a single, dedicated, and comprehensive sectoral agreement reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. Nevertheless, several agreements reached within the Brussels Dialogue address issues relevant to the status of Serbian-language education. They concern collective action by Serb-majority municipalities, activity in the field of education, the provision of certain services, financial support from Serbia, and diploma recognition.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the issues relevant to education for the Serb community that have already been covered by the Dialogue, the scope of the agreements reached, and the issues arising from a potential change in the status of the existing Serbian-language education system in Kosovo that remain outside their direct content.

Brussels Agreement: Intermunicipal Coordination in Education

The 2013 First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina, better known as the Brussels Agreement, provides for the establishment of an Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities.[55] Under point 4 of the Brussels Agreement, member municipalities have the right to cooperate collectively through the Association/Community in exercising their competencies. Education is expressly identified as one of the Association/Community's areas of activity, but the specific substance and scope of its role in this area are not precisely defined. Point 5 provides that the central authorities may delegate additional competencies to it, while point 6 establishes its representative role in relation to the central authorities.

These provisions introduce a level of collective action by Serb-majority municipalities that extends beyond the exercise of education competencies by each municipality individually. The Agreement provides that municipalities may act jointly in education and represent their interests before central institutions through the Association/Community. It provides for collective action and coordination by municipalities, but does not specify whether the Association/Community would directly manage educational institutions, provide shared education services, or primarily coordinate municipal action.

2015 Agreement: Institutional Capacity to Perform Education Functions

The 2015 General Principles/Main Elements further elaborate the envisaged institutional structure of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities.[56] The document provides that it will have legal personality, its own bodies and administration, a budget, and the legal capacity to own property and enter into contracts. Its objectives expressly include activity in the field of education, along with performing functions and providing services to member municipalities, representing their common interests, and

[55] The Assembly of Kosovo ratified the Brussels Agreement as an international agreement. Under Article 19 of the Constitution of Kosovo, ratified international agreements become part of the domestic legal order upon publication and take precedence over domestic laws. Law No. 04/L-199 on the Ratification of the First International Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia, Official Gazette of Kosovo, No. 38/2013, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8892&langid=2.

[56] Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo - General Principles/Main Elements, European External Action Service (EEAS), https://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities-in-kosovo-general-principles-main-elements_en.pdf.

cooperating with central institutions. Financing from multiple sources, including financial support from Serbia, is also envisaged.

The 2015 document therefore provides for organizational, administrative, legal, and financial capacities that were not specified in detail by the 2013 Agreement. These include legal personality, bodies and administration, a budget, the ability to perform functions and provide services to member municipalities, representation of their common interests, and financing from multiple sources, including support from Serbia. The document, however, does not precisely define the Association/Community's role in education or how that role would relate to the existing educational institutions.

A further limitation on implementing this agreement arises from the judgment of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo of December 2015, issued in proceedings reviewing the General Principles.[57] The Court found that the 2015 General Principles were not entirely consistent with the spirit and standards of the Constitution. It therefore required that the future legal act establishing the Association/Community, as well as its statute, comply with the Constitution. The Court placed the Association/Community within the framework of intermunicipal cooperation and emphasized that its legal act and statute must remain within the limits of the constitutional and statutory position of municipalities as the basic units of local self-government.

The 2015 Agreement therefore provides for institutional capacities that could be relevant to joint action by Serb-majority municipalities in education, but does not establish a comprehensive model for organizing Serbian-language education. It does not regulate the procedure for a potential change in the status of the existing Serbian-language education system or contain rules on continuity of education.

2023 Agreement: A Self-Management Mechanism

The 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalization provides for specific arrangements and guarantees to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serb community, the possibility of providing services in specified areas, and financial support from Serbia.[58] Education is not expressly mentioned in Article 7 of the Agreement. Its possible inclusion in these arrangements follows from reading that provision together with Article 10, which confirms the obligation to implement all previous Dialogue agreements, and with the 2013 and 2015 agreements, which expressly identify education as an area of activity of the Association/Community.

The Ohrid Implementation Annex provides that Kosovo must immediately launch negotiations within the European Union-facilitated Dialogue on establishing these arrangements and guarantees, in accordance with the relevant previous agreements identified by the EU Facilitator.[59] The 2023 Agreement

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[57] Constitutional Court of Kosovo, Judgment in Case No. KO130/15 concerning the assessment of the compliance of the "General Principles/Main Elements of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities in Kosovo" with the Constitution, December 23, 2015, Ref. No. AGJ877/15, https://gjk-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/vendimet/gjk_ko_130_15_srb.pdf.

[58] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Agreement on the Path to Normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia," https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en.

[59] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia," https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-implementation-annex-agreement-path-normalisation-relations-between_en.

and the Implementation Annex thus provide for the establishment of special self-management arrangements for the Serb community in Kosovo, the provision of services, and financial support from Serbia, while referring to the implementation of relevant previous agreements. These documents, however, do not specifically define how education for the Serb community should be organized.

Agreements on Diplomas

The issue of accepting diplomas was first specifically regulated in the 2011 technical dialogue.[60] The arrangement provided that diplomas issued by authorized higher education institutions would first be certified by an international academic body established by the European University Association. Following certification, the qualifications could be submitted to the competent institutions of the other party for the purpose of further education or employment in the public sector. The mechanism was therefore not based on direct recognition of a diploma, but on its prior certification and a subsequent procedure before the institutions of the other party.

The conclusions and guidelines agreed as part of the further elaboration of the agreement in 2016 regulated the recognition procedure in greater detail.[61] Professional recognition concerned the use of a qualification for employment, while academic recognition was available for the continuation of studies. They also provided for expanding the scope from higher education diplomas to primary, secondary, and vocational education, as well as qualifications at level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework. The 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalization addresses this issue more broadly. Article 1 provides for mutual recognition of documents, expressly including diplomas.

The arrangements concerning diplomas therefore address the need for a qualification obtained in one education system to produce the appropriate effect before the institutions of the other system. In this way, they contribute to individuals' educational and professional mobility, but do not regulate the status of educational institutions or the issues that would arise from a potential change in that status. Their scope is therefore limited to recognizing qualifications in individual situations, rather than regulating the continuity of the education system as a whole in the event of a potential institutional transition.

Scope of Dialogue Agreements in Relation to a Potential Change in Institutional Status

Taken together, the agreements reached in the Dialogue regulate several issues relevant to the status of Serbian-language education. They provide for collective action by Serb-majority municipalities and activity in the field of education, certain organizational, administrative, and financial capacities of the Association/Community, the possibility of financial support from Serbia, and mechanisms for recognizing diplomas between the two systems. Their scope, however, is limited. The agreements do not

[60] Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Government of Serbia, "University Diplomas," on the "Negotiation Process with Pristina" webpage, https://www.kim.gov.rs/lat/p10.php.

[61] Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, "EU Guidance on Mutual Diploma Recognition Based on the Original Agreement from 2011," https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/news/eu-guidance-on-mutual-diploma-recognition-based-on-the-original-agreement-from-2011/.

regulate a change in the status of the existing educational institutions as a functionally interconnected whole.

Education is therefore regulated in the agreements only at a general level, while its further elaboration remains subject to the continuation of the Dialogue and additional agreements between the parties. A similar approach was applied in policing and the judiciary, where the general principles of the Brussels Agreement were later regulated in greater detail through specific arrangements and implementation mechanisms.

The Dialogue agreements therefore do not constitute a special regime for the legal and institutional transition of the education system. Their significance lies in the fact that they already recognize certain issues that such a change would raise as matters in relations between Belgrade and Pristina. This applies particularly to institutional ties with Serbia, financial support from Serbia, and the legal effect of educational qualifications in both systems.

At the same time, the existing agreements do not answer how an established education system would transition from one legal and institutional framework to another. They therefore do not fill the legal gap identified in the previous chapter, but show that some issues that would arise from a potential change in status cannot be comprehensively regulated solely by the domestic law of one party.

Discussion: Three Preconditions for a Potential Institutional Transition

The preceding chapters show that a potential change in the status of Serbian-language educational institutions cannot be reduced to their individual establishment, registration, licensing, or accreditation within Kosovo's system. Kosovo already has a geographically dispersed and functionally interconnected education system encompassing different levels of education, pupils, students and employees, common curricula, records, examinations, qualifications, and established links with Serbia's education system.

At the same time, Kosovo's legal framework regulates a range of rights, competencies, and procedures relevant to organizing Serbian-language education, but contains no special regime for changing the status of a system that already operates within another legal and institutional framework. The Belgrade-Pristina agreements regulate individual issues relevant to education, including collective municipal action in education, financial support from Serbia, and diploma recognition, but they also do not contain a comprehensive regime for transitioning the existing education system.

The survey findings further show that opposition to the integration of educational institutions is almost unanimous among respondents from the Serb community, while trust in Kosovo institutions is very low. Concerns relate to curricula, the Serbian language and identity, diploma recognition, the status of employees, financing, and links with Serbia's education system. Of particular significance, among respondents who have school-age children, almost three-quarters state that they would not keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration.

The analysis does not assume that an institutional transition is necessary or desirable. However, if any change in the status of the existing system were to be pursued, the preceding findings indicate three interconnected preconditions without which key legal and institutional issues would remain unregulated. These are a special transitional legal framework, an institutional mechanism with Kosovo-wide reach, and an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on issues that produce effects in both education systems.

A Transitional Legal Framework to Preserve Continuity

The first precondition arises from the distinction between the ordinary legal regime for establishing and operating educational institutions and changing the status of a system that is already functioning. Kosovo's legal framework regulates how institutions are established, licensed, and accredited and the conditions under which they operate within Kosovo's system. As shown in the preceding chapter, it does not regulate the relationship between the institutions' existing and potential new status or the legal consequences of moving from one education system to another.

Education processes are already underway within the existing system. Pupils and students are at different stages of their education, employees have established employment relationships, and institutions maintain records, organize examinations, and issue educational documents. The regular procedures intended for institutions that are being established or beginning to operate therefore do not answer questions concerning continuity of already established legal relationships.

The role of a transitional legal framework would be to define the status of existing institutions, the continuation of pupils' and students' education, the validity of grades already completed, examinations passed, and credits earned, the transfer and continued maintenance of records, the legal effect of previously issued educational documents, the continuity of employees' established employment relationships, governance, and financing. In higher education, additional questions would arise concerning the continuity of study programs and international cooperation.

The status of pupils and students gives this issue particular importance. The right to Serbian-language education is not the same as continuity of education already begun. The possibility of organizing Serbian-language instruction within Kosovo's system does not, in itself, determine whether a pupil's completed grades, a student's examinations passed and ECTS credits earned will be recognized, or the conditions under which they could continue their education. The same applies to records and educational documents.

An Institutional Mechanism with Kosovo-Wide Reach

The second precondition arises from the geographic distribution and functional interconnectedness of the existing education system. Serbian-language educational institutions are located in the municipalities of northern Kosovo, in Serb-majority municipalities south of the Ibar River, and in communities belonging to municipalities in which the Serb community is not the majority. At the same time, the links among preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education extend beyond the boundaries of any individual municipality.

Kosovo's legal framework largely entrusts the governance of pre-university education to municipalities. This allocation of competencies, however, does not in itself establish institutional connections among institutions located in different municipalities. This issue is particularly important for schools and satellite classes in municipalities in which the Serb community is not the majority.

Intermunicipal cooperation allows certain tasks within municipal education competencies to be performed jointly, joint administrative structures to be established, and joint public institutions to be created. It nevertheless constitutes a form of jointly exercising municipal competencies and does not establish a single institutional framework encompassing all institutions in the existing education system, particularly those located outside Serb-majority municipalities.

If a change in the status of existing institutions were pursued, an institutional mechanism with Kosovo-wide reach would be needed to connect the institutions and the municipalities in which they are located and preserve their common functions. Its role could include coordinating institutions in different parts of Kosovo, performing shared professional and administrative tasks, connecting different levels of education, and representing matters of common concern before the Ministry and other central institutions.

The need for such a mechanism is particularly evident in issues shared by several or all institutions. One example is the use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia. Under the existing legal framework, before using them, a school must notify the Ministry and submit the relevant material, after which the Ministry may raise an objection. When several schools use the same curriculum or teaching material, individual action by each institution would result in a series of equivalent procedures concerning the same issue.

Consolidated action in such cases would require express legal authorization. The existing rules on intermunicipal cooperation do not, in themselves, provide that a joint mechanism may represent all covered educational institutions before central institutions. The function of a joint mechanism would relate to issues arising from the interconnectedness of the education system as a whole. Its relationship with central institutions would therefore have to be precisely defined.

The agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue are relevant to this issue because they provide for collective action by Serb-majority municipalities, including in education, as well as representation before central institutions. As shown in the previous chapter, however, they do not define the specific

education powers of such a mechanism or how it would encompass institutions in municipalities in which the Serb community is not the majority.

An institutional mechanism limited to the territory of Serb-majority municipalities therefore could not encompass the existing education system as a whole. To preserve its geographic and functional unity, the mechanism should be able to connect all covered institutions, regardless of the municipality in which they are located.

An Agreement Between Belgrade and Pristina

The third precondition concerns issues that produce legal, educational, or financial effects in both systems. Kosovo legislation can regulate the status of institutions, municipal competencies, licensing, accreditation, governance, and financing within Kosovo's system. It cannot, however, unilaterally determine the legal effect that a change in the institutions' status would have within Serbia's education and legal systems.

Issues connecting the two systems therefore cannot be fully regulated through unilateral acts by either party. Recognition of educational documents in Serbia, the possibility of continuing education within its education system, continuation of financial support from Serbia, and employees' status in relation to Serbia's institutions depend on decisions by those institutions.

Existing Dialogue agreements already confirm the need to regulate by agreement certain issues that produce effects in both systems. These agreements, however, do not contain a special sectoral arrangement governing a potential change in the status of the existing education system. If such a change were pursued, regulation by agreement would be required for issues whose full legal effect cannot be produced by an internal act of only one party.

This applies particularly to the future effect of educational documents and qualifications in Serbia. If an educational institution changed its status, the legal effect of documents it had previously issued and would issue in the future, as well as the ability of their holders to continue their education in both systems, would have to be clarified in advance.

A similar dimension exists in financing and the status of employees. Kosovo legislation permits financial assistance from Serbia, but the decision on its continuation, scale, and conditions also rests with Serbia's institutions. Certain aspects of employees' employment, social security, and pension status likewise cannot be fully resolved solely by changing their status within Kosovo's system.

Interrelationship of the Three Preconditions

The three identified preconditions concern different dimensions of the same legal and institutional dilemma that would accompany a potential change in the status of Serbian-language educational institutions in Kosovo. A transitional legal framework would primarily address the legal consequences of a change in status and the continuity of education and other relationships. An institutional mechanism should respond to the institutions' geographic distribution and functional interconnectedness. An agreement between Belgrade and Pristina would be required for issues whose full legal, educational, or financial effect depends on decisions by institutions in both systems.

The interrelationship among the three identified preconditions follows from the nature of the existing Serbian-language education system in Kosovo. A change in the formal status of individual institutions

does not automatically transfer the pupils, students, employees, records, programs, financial relationships, and other links on which the system's operation is based. An institutional transition, if one were to take place at all, should therefore encompass not only the status of legal entities, but also the education pathways and legal relationships that already exist.

In this sense, the three preconditions do not constitute a proposal for a specific integration model. They identify three groups of issues that the preceding analysis shows could not remain unregulated if a change in the status of the existing institutions and system were pursued. Neglecting them would create a risk of interruption or disruption in the provision of education to the Serb community in Kosovo.

This risk is particularly important in light of the survey findings. Almost unanimous opposition to integration, a very low level of trust in Kosovo institutions, and the willingness of a substantial proportion of parents to consider educating their children in Serbia or having their family leave Kosovo under adverse circumstances demonstrate pronounced concern about possible discontinuity in the provision of education in Serb communities. The issue of a potential institutional transition therefore cannot be separated from legal certainty, users' trust, and the preservation of access to education in the communities in which the existing institutions operate.

The central finding of the discussion is that the right to Serbian-language education is not the same as legally and institutionally regulated continuity of the existing education system. If any change in its status were to be pursued, the internal legal transition, the institutional linkage of the institutions, and issues producing effects in both education systems would first have to be regulated.

Conclusion

Serbian-language education in Kosovo today exists not only as a right established by law or as a collection of individual institutions providing instruction in the same language. It is an established and functionally interconnected education system operating within Serbia's education system. Its institutions cover different levels of education and are connected through curricula, education cycles, assessment and examination rules, records, educational documents, and qualifications. The system already includes established education pathways for pupils and students, established employment and other legal relationships of employees, governance and financing arrangements, and international links.

At the same time, Kosovo's legal framework contains a range of provisions relevant to organizing Serbian-language education within Kosovo's system. It regulates the right to education and the use of Serbian, municipal education competencies, the use of curricula and textbooks from Serbia, certain forms of cooperation with and financial support from Serbia, the special legal status of a Serbian-language public university, and procedures for recognizing, accepting, and verifying educational qualifications. These provisions, however, regulate the establishment and operation of education within Kosovo's legal system. They were not designed as a special regime for changing the status of an education system that already exists and operates within another legal and institutional framework.

This is the fundamental limit of the existing legal framework in relation to a potential change in the status of Serbian-language educational institutions. Regular establishment, registration, licensing, and accreditation procedures determine the conditions under which an educational institution may provide education within Kosovo's system. They do not, in themselves, regulate the legal consequences of changing the status of an institution already operating within another system or the relationship between its existing and potential new status.

A potential change in the status of existing Serbian-language educational institutions would not entail establishing Serbian-language education from the ground up. It would concern institutions in which education processes are already underway, pupils and students at different stages of their education, employees with already established legal relationships, and records and educational documents that have already been created. In this context, the formal possibility for an institution to operate within Kosovo's system in the future is not the same as continuity of the education already begun there.

The analysis shows that the applicable legal framework provides no predetermined answers to a range of questions that such a change would raise. These include the continuation of pupils' and students' education, the validity of grades already completed, examinations passed, and credits earned, the transfer and continued maintenance of records, the legal effect of previously issued educational documents, the continuity of employees' established employment and other legal relationships, and the transition between different governance and financing systems. Differences in the structure of the two education systems further demonstrate that continuity of education pathways cannot be assumed solely on the basis of a change in an institution's formal status.

The agreements reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue regulate individual issues relevant to Serbian-language education. They concern collective action by Serb-majority municipalities, including in education, certain institutional and financial capacities of the Association/Community, and financial support from Serbia. Their scope nevertheless remains limited in relation to a potential change in the status of the existing education system. They do not contain a comprehensive regime governing the transfer of institutions, their pupils, students, employees, records, and other legal relationships from one system to another.

The survey findings show that the legal and institutional issues are not separate from how users of education from the Serb community perceive a potential change in status. Respondents almost unanimously oppose integration and have very little trust that Kosovo institutions would protect the rights of the Serb community in such a process. Concerns are particularly pronounced regarding curricula, quality of education, the Serbian language and identity, diploma recognition, the status of employees, financing, and institutional ties with Serbia. Among respondents who have school-age children, 74.7% state that they would not keep their child in a school that would operate within Kosovo's system following integration.

The issue of continuity of education extends beyond the formal legal status of individual institutions. If a change in status disrupted the continuation of education, the use of existing education services, or the operation of institutions in particular communities, its consequences could also affect the position of the Serb community as a whole.

On the basis of the legal, institutional, and empirical findings, the analysis identifies three interconnected preconditions that would have to be considered if any change in status were pursued. The first is a special transitional legal framework regulating the continuity of already established education and legal relationships. The second is an institutional mechanism with Kosovo-wide reach capable of encompassing a geographically dispersed and functionally interconnected system. The third is an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on issues whose full legal, educational, or financial effect depends on decisions by institutions in both systems.

These preconditions do not constitute a proposal for a specific integration model or assume that a change in status is necessary or desirable. They identify groups of issues that could not remain unregulated if such a change were pursued.

The central finding of the analysis is therefore not that Kosovo's legal framework fails to recognize Serbian-language education. Its limit lies in the fact that rules intended for the regular organization of education within Kosovo's system do not also constitute rules for the transition of an education system that already operates within another legal and institutional framework. The right to Serbian-language education is not the same as legally and institutionally guaranteed continuity of existing education. A system that already exists cannot be treated in law in the same manner as an institution that has yet to be established.

A potential change in the status of existing institutions therefore could not be reduced to their registration, licensing, or formal incorporation into Kosovo's education system. If such a change were to be pursued at all, the issues on which continuity of education, the legal certainty of its users, and preservation of the functional links on which the existing system is based depend would first have to be regulated. Without the previously identified preconditions being met, any effort to change the status of the existing institutions would carry a risk of jeopardizing the acquired rights of pupils and students, disrupting the continuity of employees' established employment relationships, and disrupting the provision of education in Serb communities in Kosovo. Such consequences would not remain limited to education, but could further complicate the position of the Serb community in Kosovo.

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Harmonized recommendations

1. Frame any potential integration as legal and institutional recognition, not assimilation

Any future discussion on the status of the Kosovo Serb education system should make clear that potential integration should not amount to the assimilation of existing education institutions into the Kosovo education system in a way that dissolves their institutional distinctiveness and continuity. Instead, any potential change of status should be approached as a process of legal and institutional legitimisation and recognition of the existing Kosovo Serb education system within a mutually agreed framework. Such an approach should preserve continuity of education, the specific legal arrangements for education of the Kosovo Serbs, and legitimate educational, institutional and financial links with Serbia. This distinction should be clearly established before specific models of future institutional arrangements are considered.

2. Conduct a comprehensive legal review and ensure legal clarity before any potential change of status

Kosovo's existing legal framework contains a range of provisions relevant to education in the Serbian language. Before any potential change in the status of the Kosovo Serb education system is considered, a comprehensive legal review should be undertaken to assess how the existing framework would apply in practice, identify any legal gaps or areas requiring further clarification, and determine whether additional legal or institutional arrangements would be necessary. Particular attention should be paid to schools located outside Serb-majority municipalities. Any future approach should be based on sufficient legal clarity to ensure that changes in institutional status do not create legal uncertainty or disrupt the continuity of education for Kosovo Serb community.

3. Ensure meaningful coordination with the Kosovo Serb community and avoid unilateral measures

Any future process concerning the status of the Kosovo Serb education system should be based on substantive coordination and agreement with the Kosovo Serb community. No decision or measure affecting its status, organisation or functioning should be pursued without the consent of the community. Representatives of institutions within the Kosovo Serb education system, together with teachers, parents, students and other directly affected stakeholders, should be meaningfully involved in shaping any potential solution from the outset.

4. Consider the role of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities in future institutional arrangements

Existing agreements reached in the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue already contain elements relevant to future institutional arrangements in the field of education, particularly through the envisaged Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. Its establishment should therefore form part of any broader consideration of the future institutional framework for the Kosovo Serb education system, including mechanisms for coordination, the exercise of common functions and representation of shared interests. Any future arrangement should therefore build on the elements already agreed in the Dialogue while also identifying additional mechanisms necessary to ensure the functional and territorial coherence of the Kosovo Serb education system.

5. Ensure full and mutual recognition of diplomas and educational qualifications

Belgrade and Pristina, with the support of international facilitators, should ensure the full and consistent implementation of existing Dialogue agreements on the recognition of diplomas and educational qualifications. Existing verification and recognition mechanisms should be maintained and strengthened where necessary to ensure that diplomas and qualifications are recognised and practically usable for further education and employment both in Kosovo and in Serbia. This should address the needs of all affected groups, as well as qualifications that are not currently covered by existing mechanisms.

6. Promote clear and balanced public communication

Kosovo institutions, representatives of the Kosovo Serb community and international partners should support unbias public communication on the status and future of the Kosovo Serb education system. Communication should be available in both official languages and provide clear and accessible information on the existing legal framework, the right to education in Serbian and the Kosovo Serb education system. Particular attention should be paid to addressing misinformation, propaganda and ethnically polarising narratives on both sides, which can deepen fears and mistrust within the Kosovo Serb community while also fuelling resentment and misconceptions among Kosovo Albanians. Public communication should aim to create conditions for an informed debate and should complement meaningful consultation, legal clarity and political agreement.