

VISA LIBERALISATION - THE KEY TO STEMMING KOSOVAN BRAIN DRAIN?

As an implementor of communications capacity building programming within the Western Balkans, it is undeniable that high levels of emigration of skilled professionals, including those in the media and communications industry, from the region continues to present a barrier to the long-term sustainability of such capacity building projects. These projects are vital in ensuring ownership at the local level and can be key to the future long-lasting success of implementation, especially after the funding cycle has ended. However, without a broader policy shift, project impact finds itself highly dependent upon the trends of emigration. The pervading rhetoric amongst youth in Kosovo, not least the next generation of potential media and communications professionals, is that the only way to access tangible opportunities for both academic and career development is to move abroad. The Kosovan government has implemented a wide range of policies in order to encourage citizens to both remain in their nation state, or to even return from abroad, however without additional advocacy from the international community, the impact of these policies and the ability to communicate them could be lacking in reaching its true potential.

One of the key issues raised by Kosovars is their inability as Kosovan citizens to travel freely outside of Kosovo. Currently citizens of Kosovo only have visa free travel to 6 countries - Albania, Turkey, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and the Maldives. Travel to any other nation requires obtaining visa – often a lengthy and extremely costly process, without any guarantee of success.





Whilst visa liberalisation at first may seem contradictory to the goal of reversing the effects of 'Brain Drain' in Kosovo, it could instead be the missing key in helping to stem it. The role that visa liberalisation could play is that it would allow citizens, including budding communications professionals, to freely explore the world and gain a wealth of knowledge and skills without having to permanently emigrate. The process of achieving citizenship in many Western nations is extremely complicated, and often tied to rules surrounding remaining in the host nation for up to 10 years without spending extended periods abroad, by which time return to their home country is daunting and often unattractive. However, their time in other host countries can be incredibly productive. For example, in the case of communications professionals, developing skills and working in foreign-based agencies can provide Kosovo with a pool of experienced communicators, if only they feel free to work back home and travel relatively easily.

If visa liberalisation was achieved, Kosovo's media and communications industry would be ideally placed to thrive within the international community – it would be in an advantageous position to offer its citizens a local media environment that nurtures professional development whilst remaining integrated within the globalised society. As a result of this developing pool of experienced communicators, the international community would thus see a much more tangible impact on capacity building projects, where skills developed in individuals not only stays in country, but has the opportunity to cascade throughout each organisation.

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