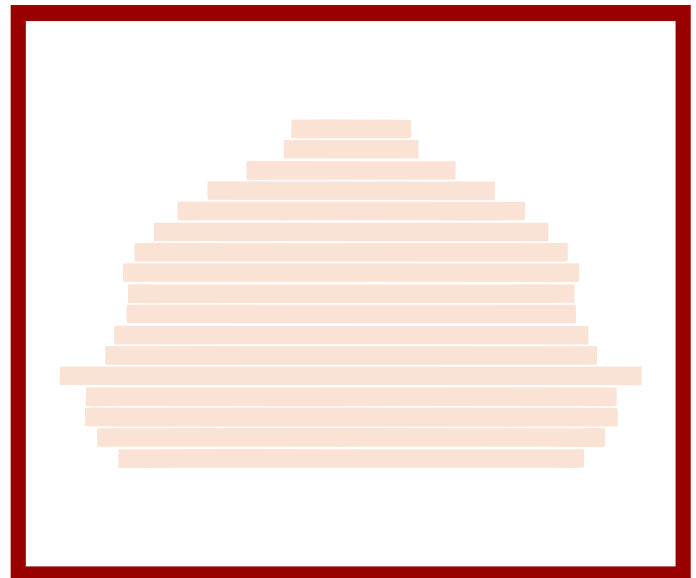
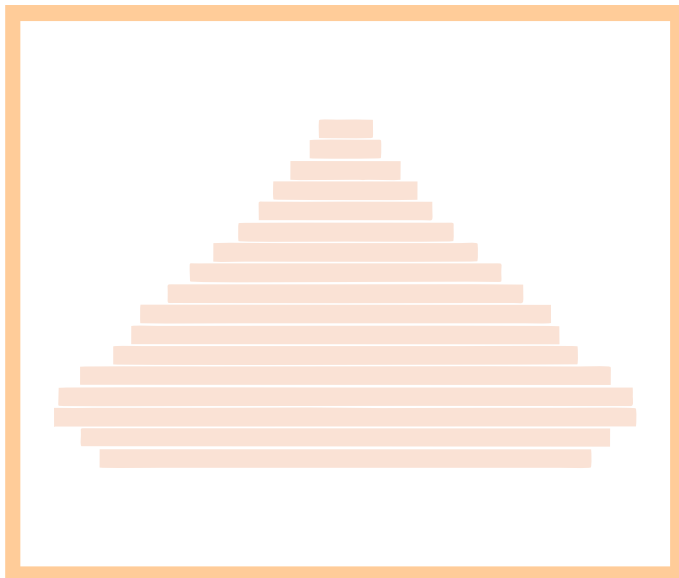

Kosovo's 2024 Census: unpacking the implications of demographic shifts for policy and development



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I. Executive summary

The 2024 Census is a landmark achievement in Kosovo's efforts to update and modernize demographic and socio-economic data collection, more than a decade after the 2011 census. It provides the most comprehensive and technologically advanced overview of Kosovo's population to date, offering crucial insights for evidence-based policymaking, institutional planning, and sustainable development strategies.

The Census reveals significant demographic changes. For the first time in decades, Kosovo's population has declined, driven by high emigration rates and falling fertility. Life expectancy has improved, but combined with reduced fertility, this is producing an ageing population with growing implications for pensions, healthcare, and long-term care. Population density decreased to the levels last recorded in the early 1980s. This decline is uneven across regions, with rural areas facing depopulation while urban centres, especially Prishtina, continue to grow.

Urbanisation has intensified, fuelling demand for housing, transport, and public services in cities while rural areas confront shrinking labour forces, underused schools, and declining infrastructure. Internal migration, particularly among youth, deepens the rural–urban divide and raises concerns over spatial equity. Kosovo remains relatively young compared to Europe, but the increasing share of elderly highlights the urgency of policy reforms.

Key findings underline pressing challenges. Demographic ageing will reduce the labour force, dampen consumption and investment, and increase fiscal pressures on social systems. Migration remains a critical concern, draining young talent and exacerbating regional disparities. Education and healthcare systems face geographic imbalances: urban schools are overburdened, while rural facilities are underutilised; urban healthcare requires expanded resources, while depopulated areas must maintain minimum service levels. Housing markets reflect urban densification and widespread uninhabited dwellings, calling for stronger urban planning and balanced development policies.

The Census data points to clear policy priorities. Key recommendations include:

- Expanding female labour participation through childcare, parental leave, flexible work, and entrepreneurship support.
- Developing long-term, community-based care systems and strengthening the care workforce.

- Coordinating education investment with demographic trends, especially in fast-growing municipalities, while linking education policies with local economic development.
- Initiating comprehensive pension reform by aligning retirement age with life expectancy.
- Promoting lifelong learning and the “silver economy” to leverage the opportunities of longer lifespans.
- Stimulating balanced regional growth through targeted investments in rural economies, youth skills, and diaspora engagement.
- Strengthening urban planning, affordable housing policies, and transport management to ensure sustainable city growth.

In summary, the 2024 Census provides a decisive call for Kosovo’s institutions to adapt to emerging demographic realities. Proactive, targeted policies, grounded in reliable data, will be essential for sustaining growth, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring equitable development across Kosovo.

II. Overview of the 2024 Census

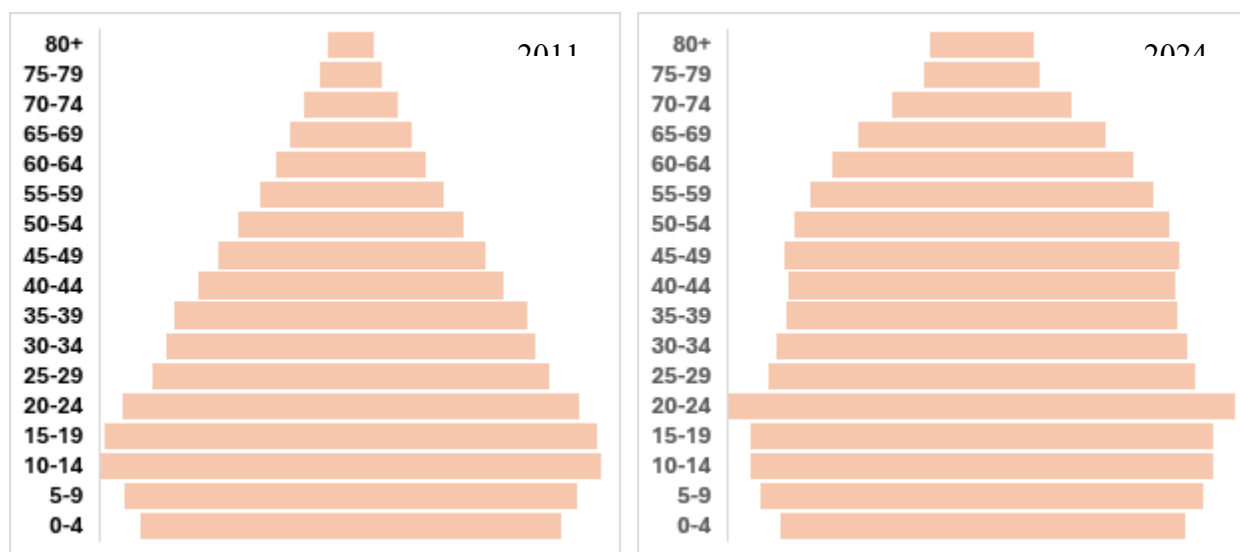
The 2024 Census marks a critical milestone in Kosovo's efforts to update its demographic and socio-economic data, more than a decade after the previous census conducted in 2011. As the most comprehensive and methodologically advanced data-gathering exercise in the country to date, the 2024 Census provides a fresh and detailed snapshot of Kosovo's population structure, living conditions, spatial distribution, and migration trends. These insights are crucial for informing evidence-based public policy, enhancing institutional planning, and aligning national strategies with the real needs of communities across Kosovo. The 2024 Census reveals a series of important demographic shifts when compared to the 2011 baseline. Perhaps the most important, Kosovo has experienced a modest but significant decline in its overall population. This development marks a turning point after decades of population growth and can be largely attributed to two converging trends, namely high levels of emigration and declining fertility rates. Improvements in overall quality of life and reductions in mortality have increased life expectancy, and this, along with declining fertility rates, is contributing to a gradually ageing population. The average population density has dropped from 163 inhabitants per square kilometre in 2011 to 147 in 2024, returning to levels last seen in the early 1980s. This decline is not evenly distributed across regions, further emphasising internal disparities. According to the 2024 Census, urbanisation has continued to intensify, both in scale and territorial spread. Larger cities, particularly Prishtina and its suburbia, have experienced sustained population growth, whereas many rural and remote municipalities are facing steep population decline. These rural areas increasingly struggle with school closures, a shrinking labour force, and underutilised public infrastructure. Such trends raise concerns over spatial equity and the sustainability of public service delivery outside urban areas. The growth in internal migration, particularly among youth seeking better educational and employment opportunities, has deepened the urban-rural divide and underlines the need for balanced regional development policies. The Census also provides a more detailed understanding of Kosovo's demographic structure. While the population remains relatively young compared to most European countries, the 2024 data show a noticeable increase in the proportion of elderly residents. This ageing trend is expected to accelerate in the coming decades, increasing the burden on pension systems and the demand for long-term care services. The emerging age imbalance poses both social and economic challenges and requires timely policy interventions focused on retirement reform, active ageing, and expanded social and health care infrastructure for the elderly.

Beyond demographics, the 2024 Census employed improved methodological practices and digital tools that enhanced data quality. For the first time, electronic data collection methods were widely employed, increasing the accuracy and efficiency of the enumeration process. The findings from the 2024 Census highlight the need for Kosovo's institutions to adapt policy priorities to reflect changing demographic realities. Targeted investments in education, healthcare, urban planning, and labour market activation, particularly among women and youth, will be critical to sustaining economic growth and social cohesion in the coming years.

III. Demographic change, pension system and social welfare

Kosovo has historically been characterised by its young population, with 45 per cent of the population aged under 30 years old as of 2024. However, demographic shifts are evident when compared to the 2011 census, in which 55 per cent of the population fell under this age group. Kosovo population pyramids show a shift from a broad-based, youthful structure with many children and teenagers to a more balanced distribution, marked by a smaller youth share and a relatively larger proportion of adults, indicating declining birth rates and gradual population ageing (Figure 1). The message from the Census 2024 data is consistent - Kosovo's demographic dividend is closing.

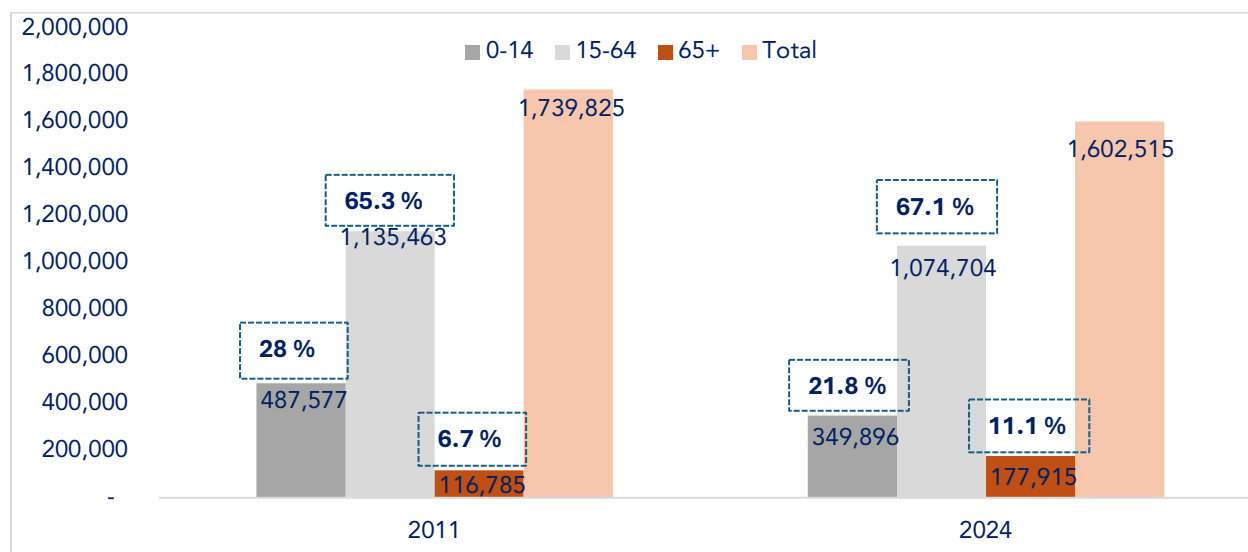
Figure 1. Population pyramids 2011 vs 2024



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

In 2011, approximately 7 per cent of the population was aged 65 or above, and by 2024 this figure had risen to 11 per cent. This demographic shift is visualised in Figure 2 where the share of children (0–14) fell from 28% in 2011 to 21.8% in 2024; working-age (15–64) edged up from 65.3% to 67.1%; and the 65+ population rose from 6.7% to 11.1%. However, in absolute terms, the population of children (0-14) and working age (15-64) declined modestly between the two reference points.

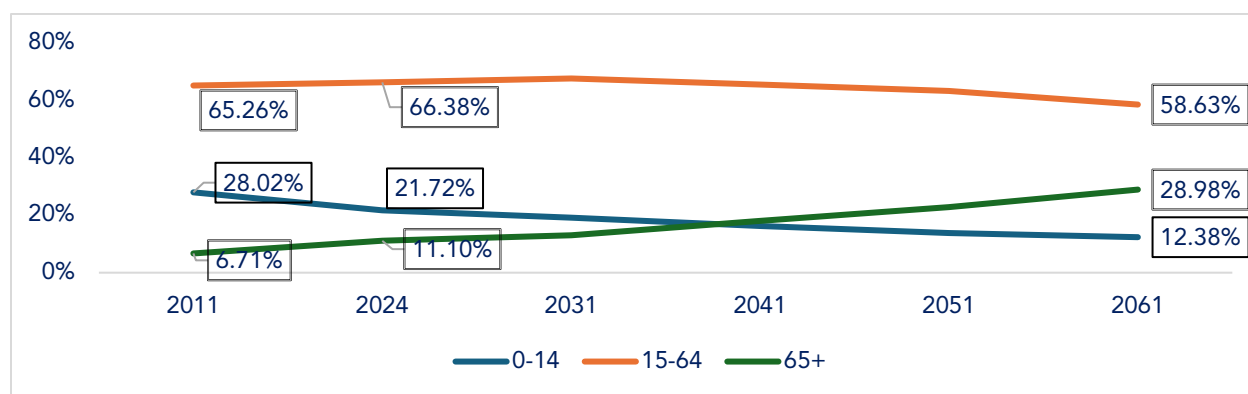
Figure 2. Demographic shifts across main age groups



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

While the share of the elderly is increasing, the share of the working age population is projected to gradually decrease to less than 60 per cent by 2061, and the share of children in the total population will decrease to less than 20 per cent (Figure 3). The projections are derived using the medium variant scenario of the [Kosovo Agency of Statistics](#).¹ This scenario suggests that in the future, Kosovo will have more older people than children, raising questions about the current pension system.

Figure 3. Projected demographic changes over time

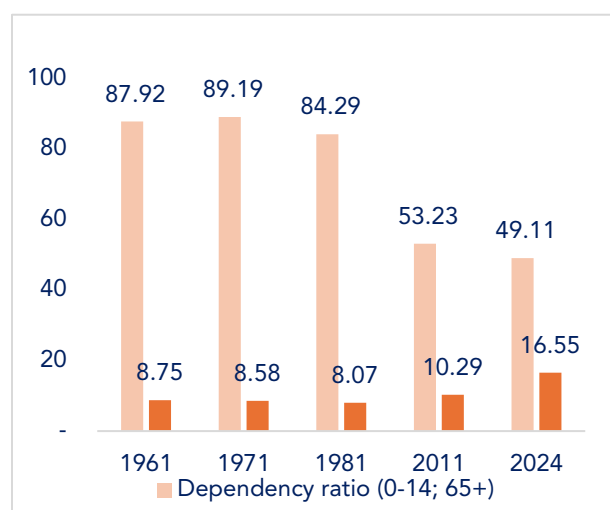


Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

¹ In two alternative scenarios, namely pessimistic (low) and optimistic (high), by 2061 the share of the population aged 0–14 is projected to be 8% and 13%, respectively, while the share of the population aged 65 and above will reach 41% and 27%, respectively. The working-age population (15–64 years) is estimated to account for between 51% and 60% across all three scenarios.

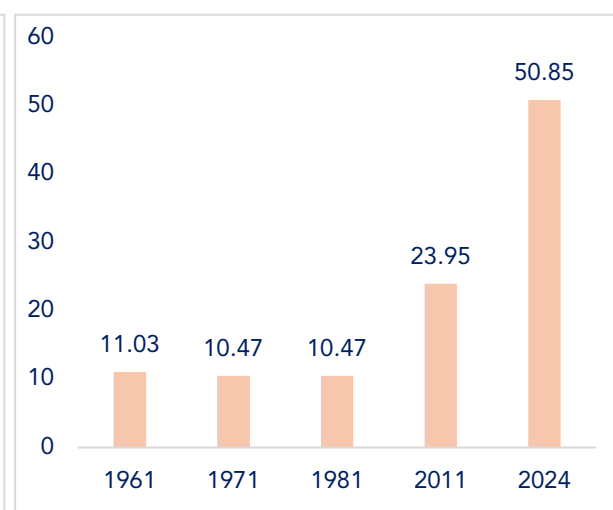
To evaluate the financial burden that dependents (children and older people) place on the working-age population, the so-called old age dependency ratio and total dependency ratio are calculated (Figure 4).² Kosovo's total dependency ratio fell from 53 in 2011 to 49 in 2024. However, the old-age dependency ratio rose from 10 per cent in 2012 to almost 17 in 2024. This suggests that there are now 17 elderly people for every 100 individuals of working age, compared to 11 as they were in 2011. Dependency ratio is a key indicator that reflects the economic implications of demographic trends, which have been primarily influenced by declining birth rate and increased life expectancy. Declining fertility rates pose challenges for the labour market and economic growth, as a shrinking working-age population must support an expanding elderly population. At the same time, rising life expectancy imposes additional fiscal pressures on public services.³ These implications are also measured with another summary metric, called the ageing index, which indicates that the ratio of older persons 65+ per 100 children 0–14 jumped from almost 24 in 2011 to 51 in 2024 (Figure 5). In practical terms, where there were roughly 24 older persons for every 100 children a little over a decade ago, there are now about 51.

Figure 4: Dependency ratio



Source: Author's calculations

Figure 5: Ageing index



Source: Author's calculations

² The total dependency ratio measures the number of dependents, those aged 0–14 and over 65, relative to the working-age population (ages 15–64). The old-age dependency ratio, by contrast, compares only those aged 65 and over to the working-age population.

³ Harper, S (2014). Economic and social implications of ageing societies. [\(PDF\) Economic and social implications of ageing societies](#)

Since human capital is a key driver of economic development, population ageing carries significant implications. It not only signals a narrowing window of demographic advantage but also points to growing fiscal and social policy pressures, particularly in pension systems, social protection, and long-term care. The growing share of people aged 65 and over, combined with declining inflows of young entrants, means fewer contributors relative to retirees, especially as out-migration disproportionately affects the working-age population. With old-age dependency already up by roughly 60% since 2011 and projected to keep rising, parametric pension reforms become necessary. Three moves could be staged now and announced with long lead times to preserve trust. First, gradually align retirement ages with longevity. The law on state-financed pension schemes requires that the retirement age be reviewed at least every five years;⁴ however, this has not yet occurred. Assuming that reliable data on life expectancy at retirement are available, the review should be undertaken, with the retirement age ideally linked to life expectancy. The IMF (2024) recommends, as one option, raising the retirement age by two-thirds of the increase in life expectancy at age 65, thus maintaining a roughly constant ratio between working years and years in retirement.⁵

Second, given Kosovo's diaspora and mobility patterns, transferability matters. Therefore, recognize contribution histories across borders and create low-friction channels for diaspora workers to contribute to Kosovo-based pension accounts; complementary, occupational or voluntary second-pillar schemes, with default lifecycle funds, low fees, can build buffers that reduce future pressure on tax-financed old-age benefits. Finally, targeted adequacy must be preserved. As the elderly population grows, so too does the risk of old-age poverty, particularly for women and workers with fragmented careers. A minimum pension floor that is modest but indexed can prevent poverty, while extra benefits should focus on the lowest-income older adults to avoid unsustainable universal expansions.

Demographics drive not only pensions but also care demand. The cross-over in Figure 3 implies that by the 2040s, older adults will be the predominant dependent group. Long-term care (LTC) is expensive when it defaults to institutions; it is more sustainable and better aligned with preferences when provided close to home. Kosovo should lay the foundations for a community-first LTC model. Since family remains the primary care provider, the state's role is to supplement and professionalize, not displace. Small caregiver allowances tied to training and respite options can prevent burnout and delay costly institutionalization. In parallel, increase the care workforce and integrate geriatric competencies into nursing curricula.

⁴ Article 17 of [The Law No. 04/L-131 on Pension Schemes Financed by the State](#)

⁵ International Monetary Fund (IMF) Country Reports 24/365, 2024. [The Challenges of the Pension Reform in Kosovo.](#)

Financing should be prudent. Rather than launching an open-ended entitlement, Kosovo can phase in a means-tested LTC benefit for high-need, and low-income elders. Public finances can remain stable even with demographic shifts if participation and productivity rise. The projected fall in the working-age share in the coming decades can be cushioned by raising labor-force participation, especially among women, through affordable childcare, flexible public-sector schedules, and contribution credits that acknowledge caregiving periods without reducing lifetime pension entitlements. Just as important is productivity growth, with strong vocational pathways and diffusion of digital and green technologies to the private sector. With fewer young entrants, growth will need to rely on deepening human capital and increasing capital intensity.

IV. Demographic shifts and education

As Kosovo navigates a period of significant social and economic transition, demographic trends revealed by recent census data provide critical insights for shaping future policy priorities. A comparison between Kosovo's 2024 and 2011 Census data shows demographic shifts that are particularly notable in the structure and size of the youth population. These changes carry direct implications for the education sector, which remains a critical pillar of Kosovo's long-term development. In this context, responding to demographic changes requires a comprehensive and systemic approach to education reform, one that is based in evidence, responsive to emerging needs, and tailored to Kosovo's evolving social and regional realities.

Educational attainment is widely recognized as a key driver of human capital formation and long-term development, and the trends captured by the recent census illustrate significant progress in this regard. Between 2011 and 2024, Kosovo has achieved notable improvements in education across its population (table 1). The number of individuals with completed higher education has doubled, rising from 116,912 to 233,559. In relative terms, the percentage of the population aged 10 years and older with completed higher education, increased from around 8% to 17%.⁶ The share of the population completing upper secondary education has also grown, while those with only lower secondary or primary education have declined. Of particular significance is the decline in the number of illiterate individuals, indicating a broader access to literacy and basic education.

⁶ Eurostat reports the percentage of the population aged 10 years and older with completed education because this age threshold captures the portion of the population that has typically had the opportunity to complete at least basic education. Reporting by age 10+ ensures that very young children, who are still in the process of starting school, are excluded, providing a more accurate measure of educational attainment in the population.

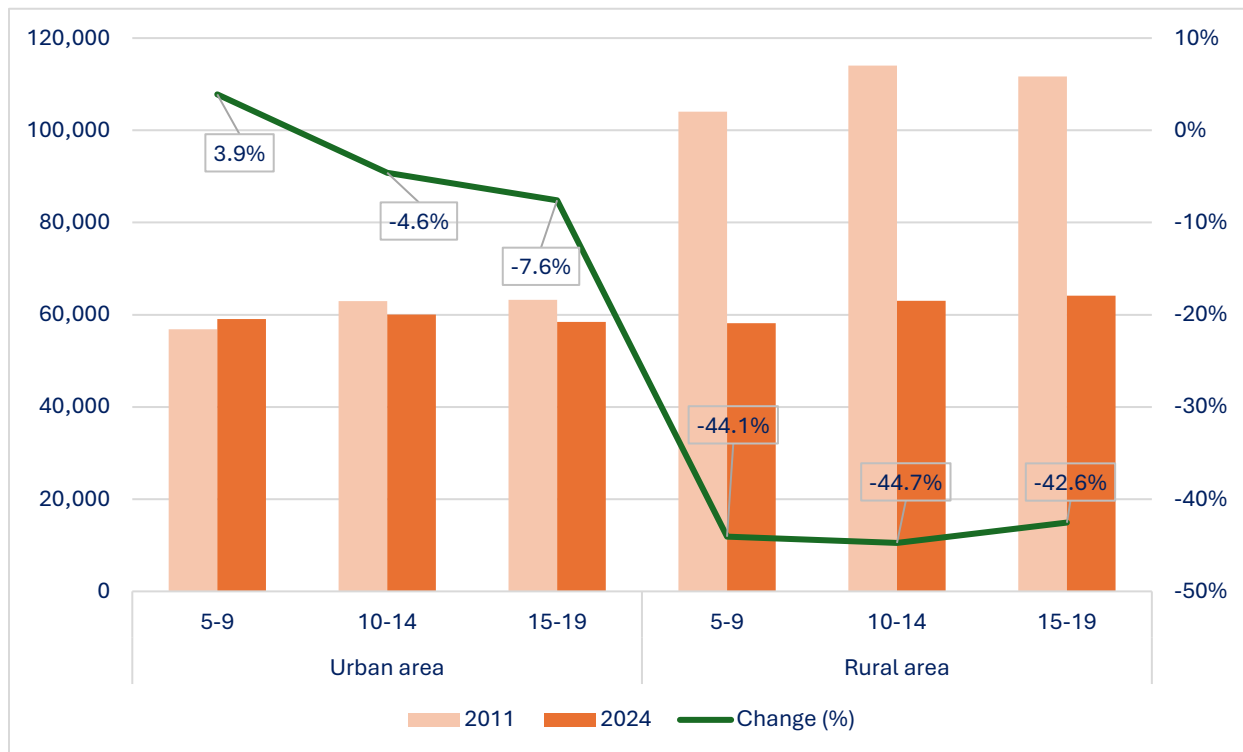
Table 1. Educational attainment and literacy levels

| Main education indicators | 2011 | 2024 | Change |
|--|---------|---------|--------|
| Population with completed higher education | 116,912 | 233,559 | ↑ |
| Percentage of the population aged 10 years and older with completed higher education | 8.18% | 17.17% | ↑ |
| Population with completed upper secondary education | 427,905 | 475,809 | ↑ |
| Percentage of the population with upper secondary education in the population aged over 10 years | 29.94% | 34.97% | ↑ |
| Population with completed lower secondary education | 501,617 | 389,030 | ↓ |
| Percentage of the population with lower secondary education in the population aged 10 years and older | 35.10% | 28.59% | ↓ |
| Population with completed primary education | 245,552 | 186,020 | ↓ |
| Percentage of the population with primary education in the population aged 10 years and older | 17.18% | 13.67% | ↓ |
| Population without formal education / not completed any level of education but literate | 82,188 | 24,408 | ↓ |
| Percentage of the population without formal education / did not complete the level of education for reading and writing skills | 5.75% | 1.79% | ↓ |
| Total number of illiterate population | 55,001 | 30,902 | ↓ |
| Percentage of illiterate individuals in the population aged 10 years and older | 3.85% | 2.27% | ↓ |

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

While educational attainment has improved, it is also important to consider the demographic dynamics shaping the future demand for education. The school-age population (5–19 years) has undergone notable shifts in both rural and urban areas. In urban areas, the population aged 5–9 increased slightly by 3.9%, while the 10–14 and 15–19 age groups recorded modest declines of 4.6% and 7.6%, respectively. This suggests that the school-age population in cities has remained relatively stable, placing only limited pressure on urban schools. By contrast, rural areas have seen a sharp contraction across all age groups, with the 5–19 population declining by more than 40%, including reductions of over 44% in the 10–14 and 15–19 groups (figure 6). These steep declines point to a major demographic shift away from rural communities.

Figure 6. Change in population structure by school-age group and geographical distribution



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

Demographic shifts in the school-age population are also evident at the municipal level. The table below highlights five municipalities that experienced the most pronounced changes between 2011 and 2024. Fushe Kosova (55%) and Gracanica (54%) recorded strong growth in their school-age populations, whereas larger municipalities such as Gjilan (-36%), Gjakova (-41%), and Prizren (-36%) experienced steep declines. These patterns may suggest that municipalities closer to the capital or offering better economic opportunities are attracting more residents, while others are undergoing significant depopulation. In some municipalities, many schools now have very few students per class, and in some cases, all levels have minimal enrolment. Certain school buildings may be operating at a rather small fraction of their intended capacity, while others may have quietly closed or merged. These trends raise concerns about the quality of education in depopulated areas, the cost-efficiency of maintaining underutilized infrastructure, and the broader social impact on children.

Table 2. Change in the school-age population (Ages 5–19) in most affected municipalities⁷

| Municipality | 2011 | 2024 | Change |
|--------------|--------|--------|---------|
| Fushe Kosova | 9,882 | 15,307 | 5,425 |
| Gracanica | 2,570 | 3,952 | 1,382 |
| Gjilan | 26,879 | 17,075 | -9,804 |
| Gjakova | 28,620 | 16,865 | -11,755 |
| Prizren | 51,893 | 32,995 | -18,898 |

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

These demographic and educational shifts have important policy implications for Kosovo. On the one hand, the steady rise in educational attainment strengthens the country's human capital, positioning it for greater economic competitiveness and long-term development. However, the uneven distribution of the school-age population, marked by stability or growth in urban municipalities and steep declines in many rural ones, creates challenges for the education system. Under-enrolled schools in rural areas not only risk inefficiency and higher per-student costs but also raise concerns about educational quality, equal access, and the social well-being of children in communities. At the same time, urban schools may face growing demand in certain municipalities, requiring adjustments in infrastructure, staffing, and resource allocation.

The growing imbalance between shrinking rural areas and expanding urban centers demands a comprehensive rethinking of school planning, targeted education policies, and long-term investment strategies. In municipalities experiencing severe depopulation, policymakers should consider consolidating underutilized schools while ensuring that students can continue to access education safely and conveniently through investments in school transportation and optimized school networks. This approach would help maintain the quality and sustainability of education in areas with declining enrolment, while reducing the cost of maintaining underused infrastructure.

In rapidly growing urban centres, particularly around Prishtina, strategic expansion of educational capacity is essential. Local governments should accelerate investments in new schools, additional classrooms, and recruitment of qualified staff to meet increasing demand. Reducing class sizes and modernizing facilities should also be prioritized to maintain high standards of educational quality and promote equity among students, particularly as urban schools face pressure from rising enrolment.

Beyond infrastructure improvements, education policies must be linked to broader regional development strategies. Incentivizing economic opportunities in depopulating municipalities—through support for local businesses, and job creation programs, can help slow outward migration and retain young families, contributing to more balanced demographic trends. Strengthening coordination between education planning, demographic monitoring, and local economic policies will be critical to ensure that the education system remains efficient, resilient, and equitable. By aligning investments, school network planning, and regional development efforts, Kosovo can create an education system that adapts dynamically to population shifts while providing high-quality, accessible education for all children, regardless of location.

⁷ The table shows the three municipalities most significantly affected by both increases and decreases in the school-age population.

V. Implications in public health services

One of the main factors influencing the decrease in the birth rate in Kosovo is the decline in the population of the reproductive age group (15–49 years), which has fallen by over 16% at the national level. This decline is closely linked to the emigration of many young people and young families seeking better living and employment conditions abroad.⁸ In addition, lifestyle changes, urbanization, and personal choices - such as opting for smaller families and prioritizing quality over quantity in parenting - also contribute to this trend. The tendency to postpone family formation and childbirth to older ages has further reduced births in the short term. Internal migration has also led to significant declines in certain municipalities. These demographic shifts are not merely statistical observations but have direct implications for public policy, particularly in the health sector.

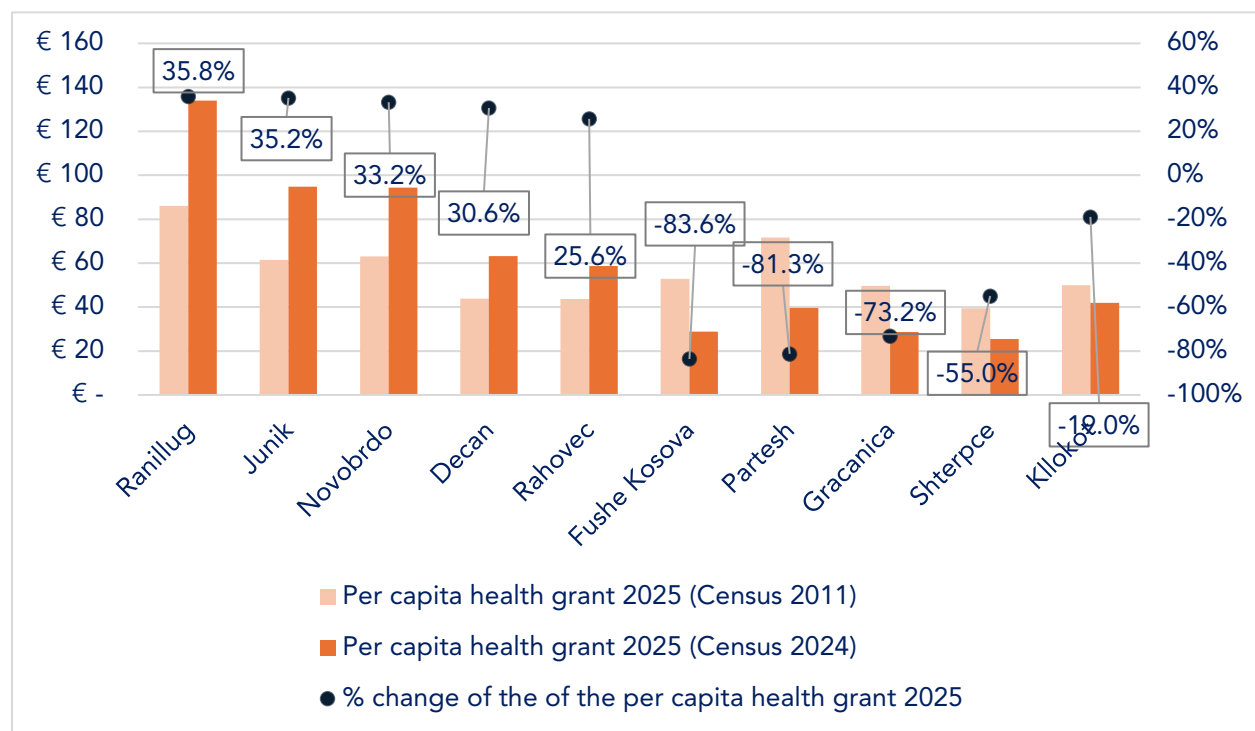
According to the Law on Health No. 04/L-125 and Administrative Instruction No. 04/2020, Primary Health Care in Kosovo is provided through Family Medicine Centres and Ambulances, with staffing levels defined relative to the population. Each Family Medicine Centre must serve at least 10,000 inhabitants, while a team consisting of a family doctor and two nurses must cover at least 2,000 inhabitants. With the updated 2024 population census, these calculations are expected to change significantly. At the national level, the number of required family doctors is projected to decrease from 909 to 801, a reduction of 109 doctors. The number of nurses is expected to drop from 1,818 to 1,602, while the number of dentists will decrease from 374 to 320. These changes highlight how demographic shifts directly affect health services, requiring continuous adaptation of policies and resource planning.

These demographic shifts have important budgetary implications. In the 2025 approved budget, EUR 81.8 million has been allocated nationally for the health grant, distributed according to the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework and Budget Circular 2025/01, based on 2011 census data. Using the 2024 census as the new baseline would increase the national per capita allocation from €47 to €51. At the municipal level, this recalculation produces a heterogeneous effect; 25 municipalities would see an increase in per capita health grants, while eight would experience a decrease.

⁸ https://www.institutigap.org/documents/64573_Migrimi_kosovareve.pdf

The figure 7 below illustrates the ten municipalities most impacted by these demographic shifts, highlighting the top five experiencing growth and the top five facing decline. Municipalities with declining populations such as Ranillug, Junik, Novobardo, Decan, and Rahovec, benefit from higher per capita allocations, as their existing health budgets now cover fewer residents. Conversely, municipalities with growing populations such as Fushe Kosova, Partesh, Gracanica, Shterpce, and Klllokot, experience a significant reduction in per capita funding, as the same fixed budget is spread across more inhabitants.

Figure 7. Municipalities most affected by demographic shifts in health grant allocations



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

Overall, these changes underscore the necessity of updating public resource allocation based on current demographic realities. Utilizing 2024 census data ensures a fairer and more equitable distribution of health funds, reflecting actual population needs and enabling more precise planning for health services across Kosovo.

To address the identified implications, a set of policy measures could be implemented to ensure smoother transitions, protect service continuity, and enhance fairness in resource allocation. First and foremost, a dynamic health workforce allocation framework should be established, linking staffing requirements to regularly updated population and demographic data while incorporating a minimum service threshold for all municipalities, regardless of population decline. Additionally, workforce redeployment and inter-municipal service-sharing arrangements should be encouraged to ensure that communities with declining populations maintain adequate coverage, while areas experiencing growth can quickly receive additional personnel. This approach would balance efficiency with equitable access and service continuity. In parallel, a gradual adjustment mechanism could be applied, capping annual per-capita funding changes (e.g., $\pm 10\text{--}15\%$) and phase in full recalibration over two to three budget cycles, minimizing abrupt service disruptions.

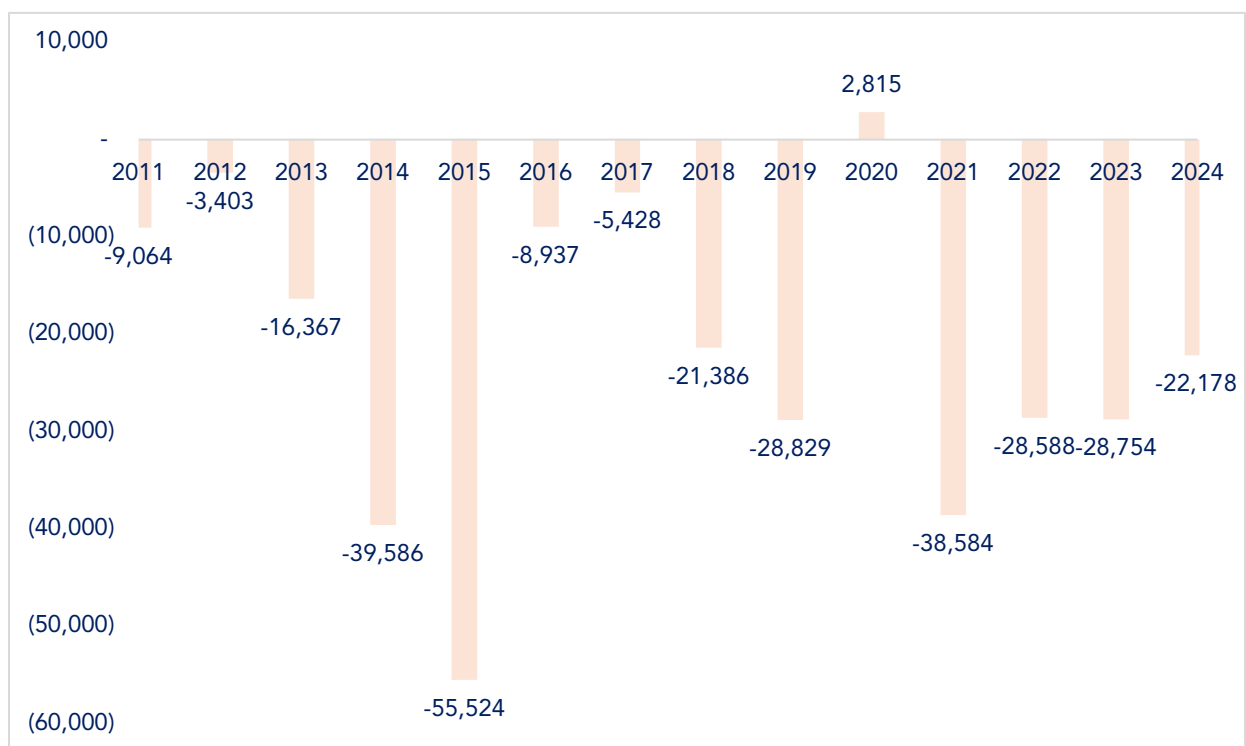
Temporary stabilization through top-up funding would support municipalities facing severe declines (over 30–40%), contingent upon the development of a service-continuity plan. Population measures could be blended by using rolling averages from administrative registers and the 2024 census, or applying a transitional weighting system (e.g., 50/50 in the first year) to soften sudden denominator changes.

For smaller municipalities experiencing substantial declines, inter-municipal pooling such as shared procurement systems or regional primary-care networks could help maintain service provision efficiently. Finally, strengthening data governance through independent audits of population and registry accuracy, combined with a formal appeal process before finalizing grant shares, would enhance transparency, accuracy, and trust in the allocation system.

VI. Migration patterns

Migration has played a critical role in shaping Kosovo's socio-economic landscape, especially in the context of its development over the last two decades. While the broader processes of globalisation have accelerated social transformations and shifted migration patterns from collective movements to more individual pursuits, largely shaped by disparities in opportunities across countries, migration in Kosovo continues to be strongly driven by high unemployment rates, poverty, and the desire for improved educational prospects.^{9 10}

Figure 8. Net Migration in Kosovo (2011-2024)



Source: Eurostat (2024)

The 2024 Census indicates an 8.8 per cent decline in the population compared to 2011. This demographic shift is further reflected in net migration data, which illustrates the ongoing challenge. In 2011, Kosovo recorded a negative net migration of 9,064 individuals, whereas this number was six times higher in 2015 and more than doubled in 2024 (figure 8).

⁹ RENATE (2019). Albanians and Migration: The Study Report. RENATE Europe.

¹⁰ MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs), Migration Profile 2023, 2024, Prishtina: Ministry of Internal Affairs.

This significant increase highlights a growing dissatisfaction with domestic conditions and a rising desire, particularly among the youth, to seek better opportunities abroad. The top destination countries for Kosovars migrating continue to be Germany and other German-speaking countries, mainly driven by these countries' labour shortages and relaxed immigration procedures (Germany). Slovenia and Croatia also rank high for labour migration, while Italy, Finland, and France are prominent destinations for family reunification.¹¹ The dynamics that underpin international migration also significantly affect internal migration of population in Kosovo. The rapid urbanisation in Kosovo over the past decade, where, for the first time, cities now accommodate more than 50 per cent of the population, is a direct indicator of internal migration motivated by structural inequalities between urban and rural regions (table 3). This trend can also be interpreted through the lens of Neoclassical migration theory, when individuals move towards areas that offer greater economic opportunities, albeit within national borders.

Table 3. Changes in the distribution of urban and rural population in Kosovo

| Year | 2011 | 2024 |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Urban population | 661,586 | 795,627 |
| Urban population (in percentage) | 38.03% | 50.18% |
| Rural population | 1,078,239 | 789,939 |
| Rural population (in percentage) | 61.97% | 49.82% |

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

¹¹ MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs), Migration Profile 2023, 2024, Prishtina: Ministry of Internal Affairs.

A detailed examination of the data, including age group and type of residence disaggregation between 2021 and 2024, reveals a pattern of regional demographic inequality. As presented in the table below, there is a significant population drop across all age categories in rural areas, especially among children and young people. For instance, the 0-4 and 5-9 age groups in the rural areas declined by 44.9 per cent and 44.1 per cent, respectively, while adolescents and young adults (15-24) declined by over 30 per cent. This trend indicates a systematic migration of younger groups from rural areas reflecting both a search for better possibilities and a lack of fundamental socio-economic infrastructure in these regions. Conversely, urban areas have seen notable growth across working-age and elderly cohorts, particularly in the 30–69 age range, with increases surpassing 90 per cent in older age groups such as 65-69 and 75-79. Such shifts could be attributed not only to an influx of working-age individuals seeking employment and services in urban areas but also to a trend of late-life relocation or family reunification within urban areas.

Table 4. Population by age group and type of residence (in percentages)

| Difference (2011-2024) | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| Urban | | Rural | |
| 0-4 | 2.1 % | 0-4 | -44.9 % |
| 5-9 | 3.9 % | 5-9 | -44.1 % |
| 10-14 | -4.6 % | 10-14 | -44.7 % |
| 15-19 | -7.6 % | 15-19 | -42.6 % |
| 20-24 | 8.7 % | 20-24 | -31.8 % |
| 25-29 | 6.5 % | 25-29 | -36.1 % |
| 30-34 | 14.5 % | 30-34 | -35.6 % |
| 35-39 | 15.7 % | 35-39 | -37.2 % |
| 40-44 | 26.8 % | 40-44 | -25.2 % |
| 45-49 | 36.6 % | 45-49 | -6.8 % |
| 50-55 | 39.8 % | 50-55 | 12.5 % |
| 56-59 | 53.1 % | 56-59 | 27.8 % |
| 60-64 | 78.5 % | 60-64 | 31.7 % |
| 65-69 | 92.6 % | 65-69 | 22.5 % |
| 70-74 | 90.9 % | 70-74 | 13.8 % |
| 75-79 | 92.7 % | 75-79 | 12.5 % |
| Total | 20.3 % | Total | -26.7 % |

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

Between 2011 and 2024, Kosovo experienced a slight decrease in the share of individuals whose municipality and residence remained the same, coupled with an increase in both intra-municipal moves to a different residence and inter-municipal migration (table 5). Gender-disaggregated data reveal pronounced differences - women and young girls consistently displayed higher rates of both intra- and inter-municipal mobility compared to men and young boys. In 2024, 22.7% of women had moved to a different municipality compared to just 9.7% of men, and 20.9% had relocated within the same municipality compared to 10.7% of men.

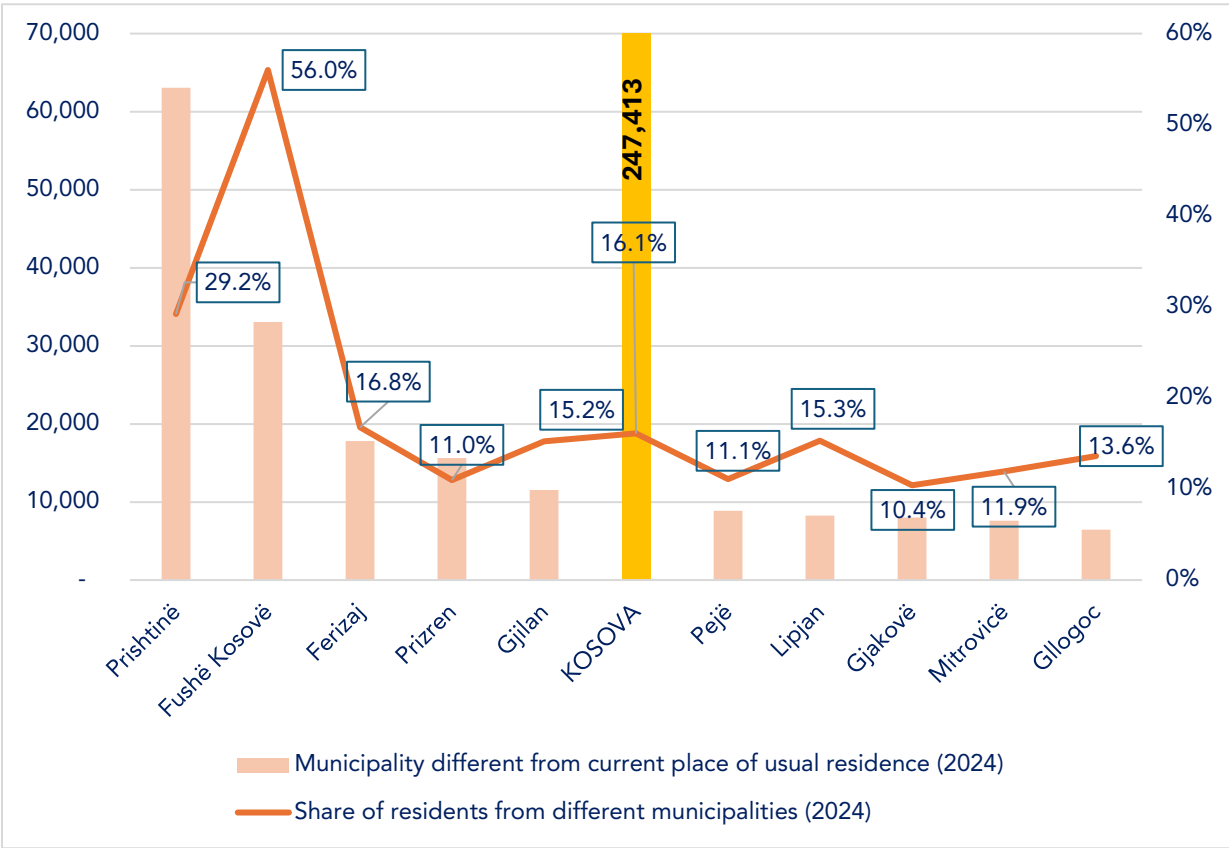
Table 5. Internal migration patterns by gender (in percentages)

| Viti | 2011 | | | 2024 | | |
|---------------------|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| Indicator | Municipality and residence same as the current place of usual residence | Municipality same as the current place of usual residence, but a different residence | Municipality different from the current place of usual residence | Municipality and residence same as the current place of usual residence | Municipality same as the current place of usual residence, but a different residence | Municipality and residence same as the current place of usual residence |
| Kosovo | 73.3 % | 12.6 % | 14.2 % | 68.1 % | 15.8 % | 16.1 % |
| Women / Young girls | 60.4 % | 19.1 % | 20.5 % | 56.4 % | 20.9 % | 22.7 % |
| Men / Young boys | 85.9 % | 6.2 % | 8.0 % | 79.6 % | 10.7 % | 9.7 % |

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

Prishtina ranks highest among the most affected municipalities in absolute numbers, hosting over 60,000 in-migrants (citizens residing in Prishtina but coming from different municipalities), underscoring its role as the country’s primary economic, administrative, and educational hub. Fushe Kosova, despite its smaller size, records the highest relative share (56%) of in-migrants, indicating a heavy dependency on residents from other municipalities. Ferizaj and Gjilan also record above-average proportions, while Gjakova, and Prizren show more modest mobility patterns, suggesting either greater local retention or weaker in-migration pull. With a national average of 16.1 per cent, the data points to significant internal mobility, likely driven by economic, educational, and housing opportunities, emphasising the need for regionally balanced development and urban planning.

Figure 9. Most affected municipalities by internal migration as per the Census 2024



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

These shifts are not incidental, but rather structurally embedded, driven by need, opportunity, and the social conditions that shape decisions to move. Such trends highlight the dual challenge of rural depopulation and urban ageing, reinforcing the urgency of regionally balanced development, targeted housing policy, and tailored service provision.

In order to tackle the intertwined challenges of both international and internal migration in Kosovo, policy interventions should focus on tackling the root socio-economic disparities driving population movements while managing their demographic impacts. At the international level, reducing the push factors driving youth and skilled workers abroad, especially high unemployment, limited career prospects, and wage gaps, should involve targeted job creation programmes in high-demand sectors, stronger vocational and higher education alignment with labour market needs, and incentives for return migration such as tax breaks and business start-up grants. Moreover, the brain-drain in specific sectors such as health, driven by migration of doctors, nurses, and other professionals to higher-paying EU markets, demands urgent intervention through competitive remuneration, performance-based incentives, and continuous professional development. Internally, policies must focus on closing the urban–rural development gap by investing in rural infrastructure, digital connectivity, quality education, and healthcare access, while decentralising economic opportunities through regional industrial zones and local entrepreneurship support. To counter urban ageing and overconcentration in Prishtina and other hubs, urban planning should prioritise affordable housing, inclusive public transport, and service provision that accommodates both working-age migrants and older populations. Collectively, these measures should be rooted in a long-term national migration and demographic strategy, linking labour market reform, social policy, and territorial cohesion to slow outflows, revitalise rural areas, and maintain the country’s human capital base.

VII. Demographic concentration and spatial development

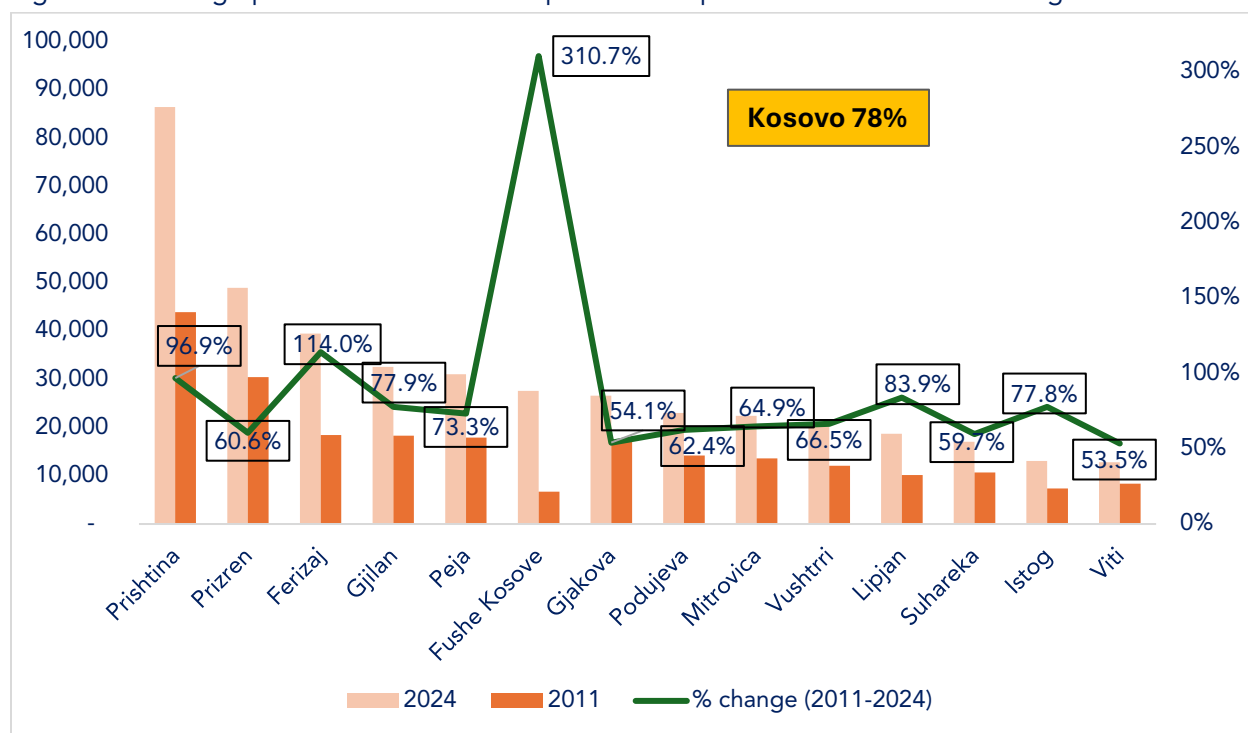
Population density is a fundamental indicator of demographic and spatial development, reflecting how citizens are distributed across a country's territory. According to the Census 2024, Kosovo's average population density stands at 147 inhabitants per square kilometre, representing a decline of around 10 percent compared to 2011, when it was 163 inhabitants per km². This figure is almost identical to the density recorded in 1981 (145 inhabitants per km²), signalling that, after decades of steady population growth, Kosovo has entered a phase of demographic stagnation or modest decline. These dynamics are not only altering the geographic distribution of the population, but also reshaping patterns of demographic concentration, with significant implications for urban planning, infrastructure development, and the equitable provision of public services across regions. At the municipal level, population density varies sharply, reflecting both the intensity of urbanisation and the impact of internal migration. Fushe Kosova records the highest density in the country, with 779 inhabitants per square kilometre, followed by Mamusha with 509 inhabitants per km² and Prishtina with 397 inhabitants per km². This surge illustrates the rapid pace of urban expansion and the strong pull of areas located near the capital, offering better access to jobs, services, and infrastructure. In contrast, several municipalities are experiencing a significant decline in density, pointing to persistent rural depopulation. Junik has a reduction of about 35 percent, now averaging only 51.2 inhabitants per km², while Ranilug has recorded a 36 percent drop, with density falling to just 32 inhabitants per km². These patterns highlight the widening demographic gap between dynamic urban zones and shrinking rural communities, with important implications for spatial planning, service provision, and balanced regional development. Although Kosovo's overall population has declined, the number of conventional housing units at the national level has increased by 78 percent.¹²

At the municipal level, Fushe Kosova stands out with a remarkable growth of 310.7 percent, indicating an extraordinary construction boom. This increase aligns with its rapid rise in population density and its role as a peripheral area of Prishtina, attracting new residents through more affordable housing options and proximity to the capital.

¹² UNSTAT defines a conventional dwelling as a room or suite of rooms and its accessories in a permanent building or structurally separated part thereof which, by the way it has been built, rebuilt or converted, is intended for habitation by one household and is not used wholly for other purposes.

Other municipalities with notable growth include Ferizaj (114.0 percent), Lipjan (83.9 percent), and Gjiilan (77.9 percent), where urban expansion is fuelled by internal migration and increased real estate demand from the diaspora. Prishtina, despite already holding the largest absolute number of housing units, has also registered a substantial increase of 96.9 percent, underscoring the persistent pressure of urbanisation in the capital.

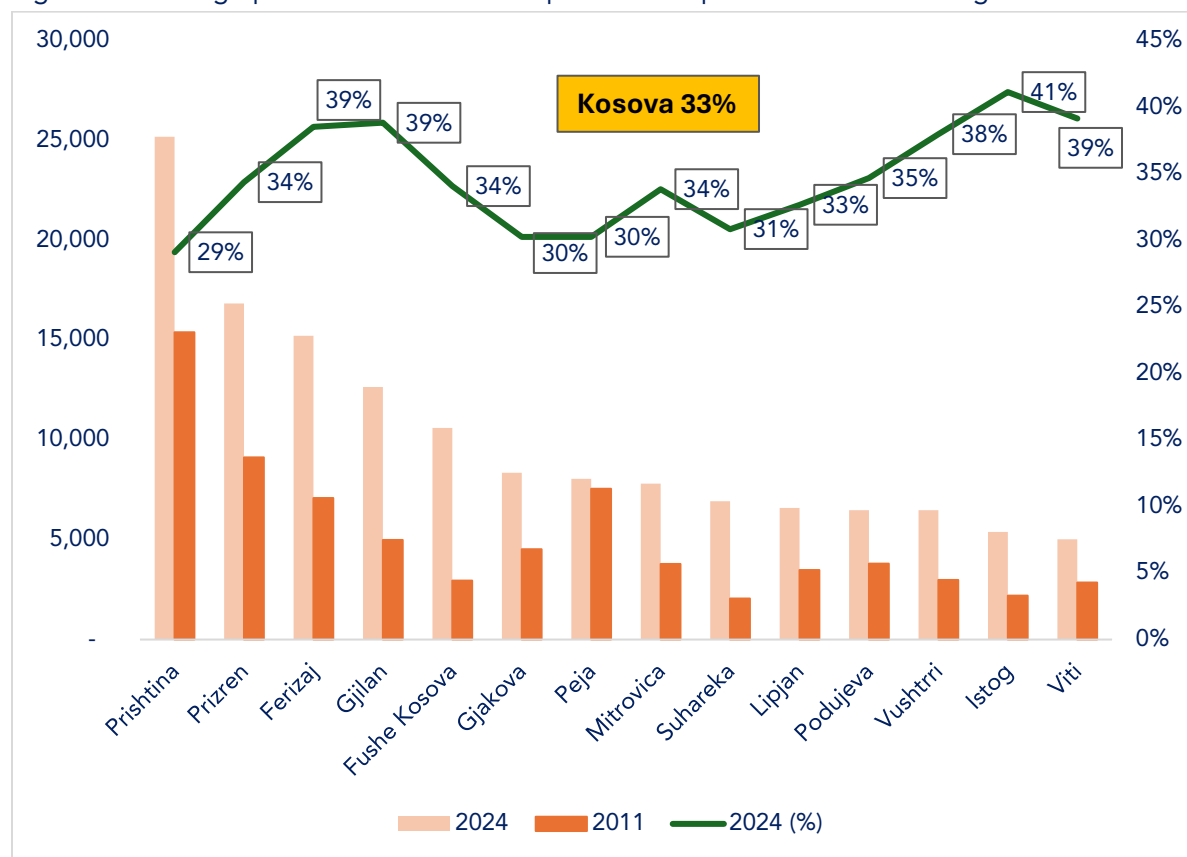
Figure 10. Demographic concentration and spatial development - conventional dwellings



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

While the number of conventional housing units in Kosovo has increased substantially, the share of vacant dwellings has also climbed, reaching 33 percent at the national level. At the municipal level, the highest vacancy rates are recorded in Istog, 41 percent, Ferizaj and Gjiilan, 39 percent, indicating an oversupply of housing relative to local population needs. In contrast, urban centres such as Prishtina and Prizren have comparatively lower vacancy rates, reflecting stronger and more consistent housing demand driven by population inflows, employment opportunities, and active rental markets. Although urban expansion and new housing construction are concentrated in and around major economic hubs, a significant portion of this stock remains unoccupied. This points to inefficiencies in spatial planning, where supply is not fully aligned with the needs of permanent residents, and to the influence of the diaspora, whose real estate investments contribute to vacant dwellings.

Figure 11. Demographic concentration and spatial development - vacant dwellings



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics

As Kosovo experiences a rapid shift of population from rural and border areas to urban centres, resulting in significant spatial imbalances, the implementation of effective policies to address this trend has become imperative. Although the government has several different development strategies, it should focus more on balanced regional development that stimulates local economic activity, service provision and infrastructure investments in rural and semi-urban municipalities. Measures could include targeted tax incentives for businesses operating outside the main urban centers, expanding and improving infrastructure, investing in digitalization and developing innovative regional areas. Furthermore, data shows that population displacement is coming mainly from the deep border areas, such as Kamenica, Dragash and Junik, which have potential for developing summer and winter tourism. Developing a dedicated tourism strategy for these regions could generate jobs, diversify local economies, and help slow outward migration.

To mitigate the challenges of the ongoing construction boom, the government, in close cooperation with municipalities, should enforce stricter urban planning regulations to better align housing supply with actual demand. Managing urban growth through coordinated transport and housing policies is essential to prevent urban expansion and ensure that new developments are both sustainable and well-connected. The introduction of progressive property taxation, especially in high-demand urban areas, as a broader fiscal contractionary measure could help cool excessive construction activity. Municipalities should also explore public–private partnerships to convert unoccupied or incomplete housing into affordable rental units for young families and low-income households, thereby addressing acute affordability concerns. At the same time, supporting balanced development through the regeneration of rural communities via incentives for young families, sustainable land use strategies, and targeted infrastructure investments, would help ease pressure on urban centers while revitalizing underpopulated regions. Finally, establishing a national housing register to systematically track supply, occupancy, and construction trends would provide the evidence base needed to design effective housing policies and ensure that future development aligns with demographic realities and regional priorities.

VIII. Concluding remarks and policy recommendations

Kosovo's 2024 Census offers a critical lens through which the country's demographic, social, and economic transformations can be examined. Emerging trends such as population ageing, shifting migration patterns, urbanisation, and uneven regional development are already exerting pressure on public services, labour markets, and infrastructure. Considering these demographic shifts, it is essential to frame policy response through the lens of demographic resilience - the capacity of societies to anticipate, understand, and adapt to population dynamics. Demographic resilience enables Kosovo to not only mitigate potential negative effects of trends such as ageing, low fertility, outmigration, and rural depopulation, but also to harness the opportunities they bring. Resilient societies recognise that demographic change is driven by a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political factors. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive, evidence-based, and people-centred policies that safeguard rights and expand opportunities. This entails investments in education, health, social protection, economic development, and governance, while ensuring that policies reflect the realities and aspirations of diverse communities. Most importantly, demographic resilience is both proactive—emphasising the anticipation and planning of change—and transformative—challenging traditional norms and structures that constrain progress. Such an approach provides a strong foundation for sustainable development and effective policymaking in Kosovo.

This brief highlights the key findings across five strategic areas: age structure, education, health, migration, and spatial development. In addition, it outlines a set of priority policy recommendations for the government aimed at fostering long-term demographic and socioeconomic resilience, while ensuring inclusive and equitable growth.

Key findings from the Census 2024 data

- Kosovo is experiencing a gradual but obvious demographic shifts toward an older population, which carries significant macroeconomic challenges. The ageing process is expected to result in a reduced labour force, lower consumption and investment, and increased fiscal pressures on the pension system, and social and health services.
- The contrasting trends of rural depopulation and urban expansion have created a geographical imbalance in educational infrastructure. While rural areas face school underutilisation, urban municipalities are burdened with rising enrolment and strained facilities.

- The redistribution of population revealed in the 2024 Census provides a timely opportunity to reform public health resource allocation. Urban centres with population growth require additional investments, while areas with declining populations may need scaled-down but essential services.
- Migration, both internal and international, remains one of the most pressing demographic challenges for Kosovo. The outflow of young people, coupled with the concentration of population in urban areas, has intensified regional disparities and weakened the economic base in rural regions.
- The census highlights dramatic changes in Kosovo's spatial structure, urban densification, rural decline, and a rising number of uninhabited homes. These shifts demand an integrated approach to planning that balances growth, revitalisation, and sustainability.

Policy Recommendations

- Promote female labour force participation. Given that women represent more than two-thirds of the working-age population, targeted measures, such as expanding access to affordable childcare and housing, and ensuring paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave, can unlock significant untapped labour potential and help mitigate the effects of population ageing. In addition, policies that encourage flexible working arrangements, support remote work opportunities, and foster women's entrepreneurship can further strengthen participation and economic resilience.
- Initiate a public dialogue on comprehensive pension reform to ensure long-term sustainability. As a first step, align retirement age with longevity - implement a mechanism that reviews and adjusts the statutory retirement age in line with life expectancy, as recommended by the IMF
- Adopt a community-first long-term care approach that prioritizes home-based and community-based services over institutional care, supporting sustainability and aligning with social preferences. This includes providing modest allowances, training, and respite services to informal caregivers to reduce family burdens and delay institutionalization, while simultaneously expanding the care workforce through enhanced nursing and geriatric training programs that integrate long-term care competencies into medical and vocational curricula.
- Strengthen population policies based on strengthening family welfare, gender equality and work-life balance, achieved through a generous and flexible parental leave system and affordable, high-quality childcare, modelled according to the successful international examples, such non-transferable fathers' leave, mother benefits, child cash allowances, income tax exemptions, etc.

- Accelerate investment in new schools, classrooms, and qualified staff in rapidly growing municipalities. Reducing class sizes and modernising facilities should be prioritised to preserve educational quality and equity. Simultaneously, recruiting and training qualified teachers is essential to reduce class sizes and maintain high instructional quality. Complementing these efforts with digital and flexible learning solutions will help manage growing student populations effectively while ensuring access to a modern, high-quality education.
- To address demographic imbalances, education policies should be closely coordinated with economic development initiatives, focusing on incentivizing local business growth and job creation in depopulating rural municipalities to retain young families and stabilize school enrolment. Additionally, fostering public-private partnerships can support the development of local educational and vocational programs that align with regional economic needs, ensuring that education contributes directly to sustainable community development.
- The government should adopt a data-driven approach to education planning by continuously monitoring demographic trends and school enrolment, using this information to guide infrastructure investments and staffing decisions. Dynamic planning models should be developed to allow rapid adjustments in school capacity in response to population shifts, while integrating demographic and economic indicators into long-term strategies to ensure the education system remains efficient, equitable, and sustainable.
- Promote lifelong learning and develop the "silver economy" to foster inclusive societies where individuals of all ages can actively participate, contribute, and benefit from increased longevity, thereby maximizing the social and economic opportunities of an aging population.
- Adjust municipal health budgets according to current population figures to ensure equitable service delivery and maintain basic healthcare access in depopulated areas through mobile clinics, introduce e-health and strengthen utilisation of telemedicine. Simultaneously, expand facilities and staff in growing urban centres. In addition, improve and strengthen home visiting for chronic patients and provide palliative care. To ensure efficient and continuous health service delivery, the government should also promote flexible redeployment of health personnel to areas experiencing growing demand and support inter-municipal cooperation through shared services, such as regional primary-care networks or joint procurement systems, enabling municipalities to maintain coverage effectively while optimizing resource use.

- To ensure health service continuity in municipalities experiencing significant population declines (over 30–40%), temporary stabilization mechanisms should be introduced, including targeted top-up funding contingent on the development of a service-continuity plan. Funding adjustments should be smoothed by using blended population measures, combining administrative registers with census data to mitigate sudden fluctuations in per-capita allocations.
- With an ageing population, Kosovo must invest more in long-term care services, promote active healthy ageing, preventive care including screening programmes, and the management of chronic diseases.
- To prevent migration – both internal and international - stimulate economic development in less populated areas through targeted investments in agriculture, small industry, and rural tourism.
- To mitigate brain-drain in critical sectors such as health, the government should enhance the retention of skilled professionals by offering competitive salaries and performance-based incentives. Targeted retention strategies should be developed for other key sectors experiencing significant outflows of skilled labour.
- Invest in youth and skills to reduce emigration and stimulate economic growth by improving education, vocational training, and employment opportunities for young people. Kosovo's growing ICT sector could be attractive for return migration and young foreign talent.
- Include young people in decision-making and policy development to ensure that their perspectives, needs, and innovative ideas help shape more inclusive and future-focused policies.
- Develop policies and programs to attract returnees and leverage diaspora capital, knowledge, and networks to revitalize local economies. Additionally, the government should continuously monitor demographic trends, and migration flows to support proactive, evidence-based policy decisions.
- Manage urban growth through transport and housing policies to prevent unregulated expansion and ensure access to services in rapidly growing cities.
- To strengthen urban planning and housing management, the government should enforce stricter regulations to ensure housing supply aligns with actual demand and prevent unplanned urban sprawl. Implementing progressive property taxes in high-demand areas can help moderate excessive construction activity, while promoting public-private partnerships to convert incomplete or unoccupied housing into affordable rental units will support young families and low-income households, addressing both housing availability and affordability challenges.

- Support balanced development through the promotion of the regeneration of rural communities through incentives for young families, sustainable land use, and targeted infrastructure investments.
- Coordinate land use and infrastructure planning by integrating population data into spatial development frameworks to guide investments in housing, schools, healthcare, and utilities.