

Emergency in Kosovo: Implementation of the Law on Foreigners Endangers Education and Healthcare – Immediate Call for European Action

The announcement of the implementation of the Law on Foreigners in Kosovo has raised serious concerns within the Serbian community, as its provisions could have concrete and far-reaching consequences for the functioning of educational and healthcare institutions operating under the system of the Republic of Serbia, as guaranteed by Article 4 of the Brussels Agreement of April 19, 2013. This law stipulates that individuals who do not possess Kosovo-issued documents will be considered foreign nationals and will be required to regularize their residence and employment through police registration, as well as by obtaining residence and work permits. In practice, this means that a large number of employees and students within Serbian institutions could face administrative obstacles and legal uncertainty, with their status and activities being directly called into question.

Within the education system operating under the Serbian curriculum (Article 4 of the Brussels Agreement), a large number of pupils and students are enrolled, and these institutions employ a significant number of teachers, professors, and administrative staff who often do not possess identity documents issued by Kosovo institutions. As a result, the implementation of the Law on Foreigners could lead to a situation in which teaching staff are required to declare their residence or obtain specific work permits—requirements that did not previously exist, as these institutions are not integrated into Kosovo's accreditation and administrative system. Such bureaucratic obstacles could slow down or even disrupt the normal functioning of the educational process.

A particularly important role is played by the University of Pristina with a temporary seat in Kosovska Mitrovica, which serves as the central higher education institution for the Serbian community in Kosovo. According to local expert estimates, more than one-third of students come from central Serbia and northern Kosovo, while nearly half of the teaching staff do not possess Kosovo-issued documents. The implementation of the law would therefore mean that these students and professors would be treated as foreigners, complicating their attendance and the continued operation of the university.

Estimates suggest that this could result in a situation where thousands of students, as well as a large number of teaching and administrative staff, would find themselves without a legal basis for their residence or employment, as they would be required to prove employment or enrollment in institutions accredited within the Kosovo system. This would create legal uncertainty and further complicate the functioning of universities and higher education institutions.

Representatives of civil society and academic organizations have reported similar challenges and have called for a moratorium on the implementation of the law, arguing that its strict enforcement, without appropriate legal and administrative solutions, could lead to the paralysis of institutions essential to the Serbian community, as guaranteed by the Brussels Agreement. They warn that, under such a scenario, thousands of students, professors, and other employees could be prevented from continuing their work and studies, as they would be required to obtain residence and work permits through a system that does not recognize their institutions.

In the healthcare sector, the issue is similar. Hospitals and health centers operating under the system of the Republic of Serbia employ medical personnel who often come from central Serbia and frequently lack Kosovo-issued documents. Previous analyses indicate that the implementation of the Law on Foreigners would require this staff to regularize their residence and employment through registration and permits, representing a significant administrative burden and a potential obstacle to the continuity of healthcare services. In such a scenario, healthcare institutions could face a shortage of doctors and medical staff, further complicating access to healthcare services for the local population, including specialized care, as professionals may consider leaving the region.

Examples from local surveys and citizen testimonies highlight concrete concerns: some parents of high school students report that their children, who are studying medicine, may be unable to continue their education or training in healthcare institutions if their diplomas—recognized within the system of the Republic of Serbia—are not acknowledged under the Law on Foreigners. This would create additional legal and institutional uncertainty regarding their educational and professional future.

Students, employees, and institutional representatives also emphasize that the implementation of the law could lead to legal uncertainty regarding the recognition of employment contracts, diplomas, and certificates of enrollment or graduation, as employment or enrollment in institutions not accredited within the Kosovo system could be subject to additional administrative procedures.

Representatives of the Serbian community believe that these administrative and legal obstacles could have broader social consequences, as education and healthcare are essential public services for everyday life. They warn that the implementation of the Law on Foreigners without clear exceptions or transitional solutions could further marginalize the Serbian community in Kosovo, create a sense of legal insecurity, and potentially hinder access to fundamental rights such as education, employment, and healthcare.

For this reason, public appeals and statements call for measures to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of educational and healthcare institutions until sustainable solutions are reached through dialogue and international mechanisms, in order to avoid consequences which, in the case of rigid implementation of the law, could have a long-term impact on the daily life and future of the Serbian community in Kosovo.

Federation of Young Serbs in Europe

Source

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