



**KCSS**  
Koozer Centre for Security Studies

# STRENGTHENING STAFF RETENTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR



December 2023



**Author:** Ramadan Ilazi

## About the Good Governance Program,

Integrity and the Rule of Law, which focuses on security and rule of law institutions, is one of the oldest programs of the KKSS. This program covers a wide range of security-related issues such as: rule of law; building integrity; Human rights; integration of minorities; parliamentary oversight and relations between civil society and security institutions; as well as the supervision of the public administration reform process, now that this sector has joined the Ministry of Internal Affairs. With the development of the security sector and emerging challenges related to institutional integrity, the program is intended to be redesigned to meet new requirements. By combining expertise and available tools, this program aims to develop continuously, through:

- Maintaining a permanent team of researchers and officials covering only the program as well as its continuous expansion;
- Diversification of partnerships with relevant institutions, as well as with various local, regional and international partner organizations;
- Maintaining consistency in terms of the quality of publications;
- Increasing communication and strengthening relations with the specialized target audience as well as with the general public.

The program is interdisciplinary, and as such will largely be related to the methodological program of the Security Barometer.



# STRENGTHENING STAFF RETENTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

December 2023

# Table of Content

<b>Strengthening Staff Retention in the Public Sector</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Challenges with the staff retention programs</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Impact of brain drain in cybersecurity in Kosovo</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Current Government Initiative: Excellence Unit</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Lessons learned from previous programs.</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Conclusion: A Hybrid Model for Capacity Development and Staff Retention</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>10</b>

# Strengthening Staff Retention in the Public Sector

Kosovo has witnessed various initiatives aimed at addressing capacity gaps within its public administration, with a specific focus on staff retention and the attraction of skilled professionals. The Cadre Fund, introduced by the Kosovo Government in 2008, emerged as a primary program to tackle staff retention challenges. Simultaneously, the Capacity Development Facility (CDF) Project, initiated in 2004 by UNDP-Kosovo and Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS) with funding from the Norwegian government, operated until 2015, supporting Kosovo's public administration reform and European integration process.

Despite these efforts, challenges in implementing staff retention programs have arisen, with political interference being a key impediment to their success. The Cadre Fund, in particular, faced issues such as inadequate emphasis on advanced education, lack of competitive selection, misalignment of positions with market needs, inconsistency in deficiency criteria, and a lack of comprehensive reforms.

Recognizing the persisting challenges, Prime Minister Albin Kurti proposed a new initiative called the "Excellence Fund" in October 2021. This fund, aimed at accelerating public sector reform, has been supplemented by the establishment of an "Expertise Unit" in January 2022. The Expertise Unit, under the Government Coordination Secretariat, focuses on engaging local and international experts to address expertise shortages within public institutions. However, concerns have been raised about the adequacy of the allocated funds for the unit's operations, with an additional EUR 20 million sought to meet the substantial demand for expertise.

This paper delves into the historical context of staff retention programs in Kosovo, explores the challenges faced by existing initiatives, and introduces the current government's Excellence Unit as a response to the ongoing need for specialized capacity within the public sector.

# Background

There have been numerous programs to address capacity gaps in Kosovo's public administration, as well as to help retain staff and attract experts and professionals to work for the public sector. The main such program from the government of Kosovo was the Cadre Fund, while one of the main non-Kosovo government capacity support programs.

**The Cadre Fund and Other Financial Programs:** In December 2008, the Kosovo Government initiated the Cadre Fund Scheme to address staff retention issues. This idea was proposed by GAP Institute as a means to "attract experts in areas that were deemed deficient in the public service."<sup>1</sup> The initial decision allocated resources to create positions for senior-level specialists, offering monthly salaries ranging from 800 to 1,800 Euros. Over the years, both the fund's budget and the number of positions grew.

In 2012, Regulation No. 14/2012 was adopted by the Kosovo government to regulate the operation of the Cadre Fund, emphasizing key priority areas, including European integration, policy development, legislation, and international relations<sup>2</sup>. The regulation outlined criteria for individuals to qualify for the fund, created a supervisory commission, and established a Cadre Fund Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2014 the Cadre Fund supported 222 government employees, with expenditures amounting to 736,736 Euros. While the program offered positions with salaries between 800 and 1,800 Euros, it primarily served as a top-up salary opportunity for existing staff rather than effectively attracting new personnel.

## **The Capacity Development Facility (CDF)**

Project was established in 2004 by UNDP and Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), with the support of the Government of Norway operated until 2015, with the aim to support Kosovo's public administration in aligning with European standards and modernization. CDF provided advisory and coaching assistance to senior and middle-level civil servants, with a focus on leadership, management, organizational development, and public policy. It evolved from a capacity-building approach to capacity development, emphasizing the interconnected and holistic strengthening of existing capacities. CDF expanded its scope to address the political component of state institutions, in cooperation with the Office of the Prime Minister, provided assistance in 14 socio-economic sectors and cross-sectors. Its adaptive approach responded to Kosovo's changing political landscape and cultural context while promoting gender balance in capacity development efforts.

The Capacity Development Facility during the period 2013-2015, aimed to enhance the Government of Kosovo's (GoK) capacities for effective governance, particularly within the context of EU integration and Public Administration Reform (PAR). Project focused on two main priority areas. First priority involved strengthening GoK capacities for the implementation of Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) policies. This entailed technical assistance, support for short-term activities and measures addressing SAA recommendations, assistance during SAA negotiations,

and sectoral strategy development. The project also enhanced the capabilities of civil servants, focusing on areas such as the rule of law, democratization, human rights, and management and leadership. Second priority centered on strengthening public institutions' capacity to implement the Public Administration Reform Strategy. This was achieved through high-level advisory and policy support to accelerate PAR objectives, guiding the Inter-ministerial Commission on PAR, the Minister for Public Administration, and the Department for the Management of PAR. The project played a strategic role in the development of policies and legal instruments related to PAR, contributing to Kosovo's administrative capabilities, EU integration, and democratic governance.

Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Mobility<sup>3</sup> of the Civil Society Forum of the Berlin process reveal that, despite advancements in human capital within the Western Balkans (WB6), disparities in development and skills gaps compared to Western economies became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report finds that the region is ill-prepared for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with brain drain hindering innovation and economic progress. To address this, the report

argues that there is a need for enhanced domestic opportunities and a supportive environment valuing local expertise. The WB region's adoption of new technologies is constrained, relying on cheap labor rather than technological advancements. This challenge is exacerbated by brain drain, impacting collaboration with research institutions and hindering technology adoption by companies.

Capacity support programs often contribute to isolated excellence, emphasizing the need for a regional entity to systematically foster cooperation among WB6 researchers, promoting brain circulation and transfer of excellence. The Kosovo Government has encountered persistent challenges in retaining qualified staff, leading to the establishment of various capacity support programs, including the Cadre Fund in 2008, aimed at attracting and retaining skilled professionals within the public sector. However, these programs have not consistently fulfilled their intended objectives, ultimately leading to the termination of the Cadre Fund 2022. This policy brief examines main capacity support programs and offers recommendations to address staff retention issues within the Kosovo Government effectively.

# Challenges with the staff retention programs

The implementation of staff retention programs in Kosovo has encountered many challenges, with a predominant factor undermining their effectiveness being political interference in program management. This interference has significantly influenced the selection of beneficiaries, leading to deviations from the programs' intended purposes and a transformation into salary top-up initiatives rather than achieving their original goals.

## **Inadequate Emphasis on Advanced Education:**

One notable challenge lies in a substantial number of beneficiaries under the Cadre Fund lacking advanced university education, a discrepancy that contradicts the fund's initial purpose. To foster the attraction and retention of qualified individuals, it is imperative for the government to prioritize the recruitment of candidates with advanced degrees and relevant expertise.

## **Lack of Competitive Selection:**

The Cadre Fund has primarily benefited internal employees rather than external candidates, diverging from its primary objective of attracting new skills. To address this, reinstating competitive selection processes becomes crucial, ensuring that positions are filled by the most qualified individuals, thereby aligning with the fund's core goal.

**Position Misalignment with Market Needs:** A significant challenge arises from Cadre Fund beneficiaries occupying positions

that do not align with the demands of the Kosovo job market. To address this misalignment, the government must meticulously ensure that positions supported by such funds correspond to the country's skill shortages. This includes a particular emphasis on English language proficiency and specific qualifications that meet market demands.

## **Inconsistency in Deficiency Criteria:**

In some instances, there has been inconsistency in categorizing subordinates as deficient personnel while their supervisors were not identified as such. Standardizing the criteria for identifying deficiency is paramount to maintain clarity and consistency, grounding these criteria in the actual needs of departments or ministries.

## **Lack of Comprehensive Reforms:**

While the Cadre Fund aimed to alleviate skill shortages, the existence of other financial programs and schemes, such as the Capacity Building Facility and Capacity Building for European Integration programs, focused on specific areas. For optimal impact, the government should pursue comprehensive civil service reforms that integrate and harmonize various financial programs, ensuring they collectively contribute to broader improvements within the public sector. This holistic approach will foster a more cohesive and effective strategy for enhancing the skills and capabilities of the public administration workforce in Kosovo.



# Impact of brain drain in cybersecurity in Kosovo

One of the main effects of the weak capacities in the public administration or the government of Kosovo, has been the lack of the ability of the government to effectively respond or prevent cyberattacks and disinformation.

A recent investigation by BIRN Kosovo has exposed a pervasive web of disinformation within Kosovo, fueled by foreign influences<sup>4</sup>. The study reveals the strain on relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs and highlights the erosion of trust in NATO and EU integration efforts. The report emphasizes the inadequacy of Kosovo's institutions, especially judicial bodies, in handling disinformation due to the absence of specialized departments. The lack of media literacy programs and limited media education in the education system contribute to society's susceptibility to disinformation. The study calls for increased collaboration among stakeholders, the implementation of media literacy programs, and the establishment of robust fact-checking mechanisms within media organizations to counteract the impact of disinformation.

Kosovo has often been a subject of cyberattacks. In 2018 after imposing a 100% tax on Serbian goods, a massive cyberattack targeted government websites and emails. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities were exposed during the parliamentary election in February 2021, and more recent attacks have targeted the Kosovo Police and government websites. One of the reasons why in many cases cyberattacks have been successful against Kosovar institutions, includes lack of capacities in the public administration. With online

crimes transcending borders, investigating and prosecuting cyber-offenders becomes challenging. The Kosovo government needs to prioritize capacity building and expertise development in the information and technology sector to enhance the security and protection of critical infrastructure.

Kosovo's cybersecurity capacities face significant challenges, as outlined in the Cybersecurity Ecosystem Report Western Balkans: Emerging Cyber Threats by the International and Security Affairs Centre<sup>5</sup>. As a result of weak capacities, the government of Kosovo heavily relies on international knowledge and information, resulting in a reactive approach based on general awareness and perceptions of existing capacities and systems nationwide. Strengthening capacities at both legislative and operational levels is crucial, as recommended in the Cybersecurity Ecosystem Report, for effectively managing cybersecurity risks in Kosovo.

To effectively tackle the deficiencies in cybersecurity capacities, the Kosovo government needs to implement a holistic strategy. Primarily, addressing the shortage of skilled professionals in this field requires a comprehensive approach. Elevating the benefits and salaries of IT experts is essential to attract and retain top-tier talent. This involves creating a competitive and appealing remuneration structure that reflects the critical nature of cybersecurity roles.

Furthermore, the government should proactively support the development of existing capacities in cybersecurity.

This can be achieved through targeted initiatives such as scholarships and other educational programs aimed at enhancing the skill sets of individuals already engaged in the cybersecurity domain in the public sector. By investing in the continuous education and training of existing professionals, Kosovo can cultivate a pool of experts equipped to navigate evolving cybersecurity challenges.

Cooperation with the private sector and civil society is central for developing capacities in the cybersecurity domain. The government should engage in strategic partnerships that leverage the expertise and resources of private enterprises but also civil society organizations that are focusing on IT. This approach can contribute to knowledge-sharing initiatives, fostering a more robust and interconnected cybersecurity ecosystem.

## The Current Government Initiative:

# Excellence Unit

The analysis conducted by the GAP Institute reveals that one of the most pressing challenges in Kosovo's public sector is the retention of specialized staff, which has led to staff departures over an extended period<sup>6</sup>. This attrition has resulted in a distinct lack of specialized capacity in critical fields, undermining the effectiveness of public administration. To address these challenges, Prime Minister Albin Kurti proposed the establishment of an "Excellence Fund" during a consultative meeting with donors in October 2021. This fund is designed to support development initiatives and accelerate public sector reform. A preliminary survey conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister identified a substantial need for expertise within government institutions, amounting to 45,000 working days. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding which institutions require the equivalent of 45,000 working days of expertise and the number of experts expected to be engaged.

Subsequently, in January 2022, the Government of Kosovo, in response to the expertise shortage, created an "Expertise Unit" under the Government Coordination Secretariat within the Office of the Prime Minister. This unit's primary objective is to engage local and international experts to provide support to institutions in areas with expertise shortages. The "Expertise Unit" is responsible for mapping the expertise needs of public institutions, managing expert engagement processes, and enhancing policy development, project planning, and advisory services. GAP Institute analysis argues that the allocation of one-million Euros for the work of the Expertise Unit is considered insufficient to meet this demand<sup>7</sup>. GAP Institute analysis shows that the government aims to augment the Fund baseline of EUR one million with an additional EUR 20 million, though it remains uncertain whether donor organizations will contribute to the Fund for Excellence.

# Lessons learned from previous programs

Drawing on the experiences of past initiatives, several critical lessons emerge that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of future programs.

## Clearly Define Candidate Criteria:

The success of any program hinges on the clarity and precision of candidate eligibility criteria. It is imperative to establish unambiguous guidelines, placing a heightened emphasis on advanced education and relevant expertise. This ensures that candidates possess the necessary qualifications to contribute meaningfully to the objectives of the program.

## Align Positions with Market Needs:

A vital lesson learned is the necessity to align supported positions with the real skill shortages in the Kosovo job market. Regular and systematic assessments should be conducted to identify the most critical skills and positions needed in the current employment landscape. This proactive approach ensures that the program addresses immediate market demands and contributes to the overall economic development of the country.

## Standardize Deficiency Criteria:

Consistency in identifying and designating deficient positions is paramount for program coherence. Standardizing

deficiency criteria across all government departments and ministries fosters clarity and fairness in the evaluation process. Developing a consistent methodology for assessing and designating deficiencies ensures a unified approach to identifying areas in need of support.

## Focus on Comprehensive Reforms:

The strategic alignment of programs with comprehensive civil service or public administration reforms is crucial for sustainable impact. Rather than serving solely as allowances, these programs should be integral components of broader reform initiatives. Aligning programs with the government's long-term goals and development priorities ensures that they contribute meaningfully to the strengthening of the capacities of the public sector.

## Implement Monitoring and Evaluation:

A robust monitoring and evaluation system is imperative for assessing the effectiveness and impact of capacity development support or staff retention programs of the government. Such a system, when incorporated into initiatives like the Excellence Fund, facilitates regular reviews and adjustments based on achieved results. This adaptive approach ensures that programs remain responsive to changing dynamics, fostering continuous improvement and long-term success.

# Conclusion: A Hybrid Model for Capacity Development and Staff Retention

Improving staff retention within the Kosovo Government is imperative for good governance and effective performance of the public administration. While addressing challenges from past programs remains vital, adapting to the evolving landscape, exemplified by initiatives like the Excellence Unit, is crucial to achieving this objective.

One of the central challenges in staff retention and capacity development programs has been the transformation

of these initiatives into mechanisms for increasing salaries, particularly for senior government staff within the civil service. Recognizing the inherent connection between salaries and the attraction and retention of expertise, we propose a hybrid model that combines the functions of capacity development support and salary augmentation. This hybrid approach involves the following components:

## 1. Create a Database of Experts:

- Through a competitive selection process, establish a database of experts and deploy them across different government institutions. These experts will provide hands-on support in critical areas such as policy development, coordination, implementation, and communication.

---

## 2. Technical Assistance:

- Public institutions are encouraged to propose experts or candidates who, upon selection, will be contracted by the program to provide their specialized expertise in identified areas.

---

## 3. Salary Top-Up Component:

- Recognizing that certain positions within the civil service are highly demanding and require exceptional expertise, introduce a salary top-up component to augment existing salaries. This measure aims to retain and incentivize staff in critical roles.

---

## 4. Focus on cybersecurity:

Implement a comprehensive strategy to address the shortage of cybersecurity capacities by enhancing benefits and salaries for IT experts, facilitating the development of existing skills through scholarships and educational programs, and fostering strategic partnerships with the private sector and civil society.

This hybrid model integrates capacity development and salary enhancements, offering a comprehensive solution to staff

retention challenges while promoting excellence and expertise within the Kosovo Government.

# Endnotes

- 1 Cadre Fund: A special fund for deficient specialist or managers? GAP Institute. September, 2015. Available at: [https://www.institutigap.org/documents/88573\\_FondiperKadroENG.pdf](https://www.institutigap.org/documents/88573_FondiperKadroENG.pdf)
- 2 Regulation No. 14/2012 on the Operation of the Cadre Fund. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8377>
- 3 Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Mobility, October 2023, <https://wb-csf.eu/publications-csf/key-recommendations-of-the-thematic-working-group-on-mobility>
- 4 Read the full report by BIRN Kosovo here: <https://kallxo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/THE-STORY-OF-OUR-LIES-FINALE.pdf?fbclid=I-wAR0hRZD90cG4uep27iFEFxcdFgLVWxcD-MC3FNqbcElxhSoosHsOTAOJ4lmc>
- 5 Read the full report by ISAC here: <https://www.isac-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PwC-Cybersecurity-Ecosystem-Report-WB.pdf>
- 6 Establishing an Expertise Unit: Past Lessons for a par excellence fund. GAP Institute. May 2022. Available at: [https://www.institutigap.org/documents/5439\\_excellence%20fund.pdf](https://www.institutigap.org/documents/5439_excellence%20fund.pdf)
- 7 GAP Institute, May 2022

Katalogimi në botim – (CIP)

Biblioteka Kombëtare e Kosovës "Pjetër Bogdani"

35(495.51)(047) Strengthening staff retention in the public sector /  
QKSS. - Prishtinë : QKSS, 2024. - 9 f. : ilustr. ; 24 cm.

**ISBN 978-9951-842-16-7**

## About KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) is a specialized, independent, and non-governmental organization. The primary goal of KCSS is to promote the democratization of the security sector in Kosovo and to improve research and advocacy work related to security, the rule of law, and regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) by supporting SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice.

Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Every year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs on security-related issues. It also runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners.

A wide-range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness raising and advocacy. KCSS's work covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to security sector reform and development, identifying and analyzing security risks related to extremism, radicalism, and organized crime, foreign policy and regional cooperation, and evaluating the rule of law in Kosovo.

This year, KCSS celebrated its 15th Anniversary. For more details about KCSS, you can check on the following official platforms:



[qkss.org](http://qkss.org)  
[securitybarometer.qkss.org](http://securitybarometer.qkss.org)



@KCSSQKSS  
#KCSSQKSS

ISBN 978-9951-842-16-7

