

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS PROVIDED BY KOSOVO AND NORTH MACEDONIA HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

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Abstract

As technology advances, automation and artificial intelligence are transforming the employment landscape, rendering certain careers obsolete while giving rise to new ones. This comparative study aims to analyze the alignment between the professional qualifications offered by public higher education providers in Kosovo and the Republic of North Macedonia, and the evolving market demands and technological trends. National qualification authorities must adopt a forward-thinking approach in allocating quotas for different professional qualifications, ensuring that they are tailored to the changing needs of the local and/or global market, as well as the prevailing technological developments. Notably, our findings reveal a significant disparity in the variety of qualifications offered by the respective public higher education providers of Kosovo and the Republic of North Macedonia.

Keywords: professional qualifications, higher education providers, market demand

Introduction

The sharing of knowledge through the provision of systematic education has made a fundamental turn in the development of human society. Mass education was a revolution within the Industrial Revolution that supplemented one another (Beno, 2019). In the twenty-first century, the rapid pace of technological advancement and the relentless march of globalization have transformed the global labor market, requiring individuals to possess specific professional qualifications to secure desirable job opportunities, experience personal satisfaction, and attain financial security (WEF, 2020). Numerous nations have witnessed a surge in higher education enrollment as a response to the recent technological revolution, as highlighted by Freeman and Louca (2001). New technological development is raising the demand for high skills rather than replacing them (Lauder et al., 2018). This, in turn, requires complementary innovations in education reforms and quality of learning. It is therefore of paramount importance that education providers keep trailing global market demands and technological development trends, by offering academic programs that are compatible with the labor market need, both locally and globally.

This study focuses on analyzing the current professional qualifications offered by public higher education institutions in Kosovo and the Republic of North Macedonia. These countries, situated in the Balkan region, share similarities in their geopolitical context and face common challenges in adapting to the changing dynamics of the labor market. By examining the qualifications provided by these institutions, we gain valuable insights into their diversity, relevance, and responsiveness to market demands and technological development trends.

The architecture of higher education institutions in Kosovo and North Macedonia are both relatively young. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, the educational system is comprised of public and private education providers. Both countries were part of former Yugoslavia and thus inherited similar education systems, covering very few study programs. With the introduction of the Bologna process, both countries aspiring European Union have introduced education reforms compatible with the Bologna process.

The significance of this research lies in shedding light on key aspects of the professional qualifications landscape in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Specifically, we investigate the student admission quota, program diversity, disciplinary preferences, leading universities, and the presence of PhD programs. These factors provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of higher education institutions in both countries and their capacity to meet the evolving needs of the labor market.

The findings of this study are important for educational policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders. By identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and discrepancies in the professional qualifications offered, policymakers can make informed decisions regarding resource allocation, program development, and curriculum enhancements. Furthermore, educational institutions can adapt their offerings to better align with market demands, ensuring graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen fields.

Through this research, we aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the optimization of professional qualifications in higher education institutions. By understanding the current landscape and identifying areas for improvement, we can foster collaboration and innovation in the higher education sector of Kosovo and North Macedonia. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the quality of education and empower graduates to thrive in the dynamic and competitive labor market of today and the future.

Methodology of study

Cumulative data were obtained from the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) accreditation results for the academic year 2020/2021. For North Macedonia and its counterpart accreditation agency - the Agency for Quality in Higher Education of the Republic of North Macedonia (AQHE), such data were not available, and authors were not able to find an official website of the agency. Therefore, the data were collected from enrollment calls from each university website according to the list of higher education institutions in North Macedonia published on the EURYDICE website. As some private higher institutions were missing student admission quotas, private higher education institutions from both Kosovo and North Macedonia were excluded. Data from both countries were filtered, classified, and tabulated for further statistical analysis relevant to the topic of this article.

Public higher institutions in kosovo

Currently, there are 7 public universities in Kosovo with the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" being the largest provider; 2 special professional faculties, and 14 private higher education institutions (Table 1).

Table 1. List of higher education institutions in Kosovo.

Type of Higher Education Institution	Institution Name	Number of academic units/ departments
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES	1 University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"	14
	2 University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti"	6
	3 University of Mitrovica "Isa Boletini"	6
	4 University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka"	4
	5 University of Gjakova "Fehmi Agani"	4
	6 University of Applied Sciences Ferizaj	4
	7 University of Gjilan "Kadri Zeka"	5
Public Special entities	1 Faculty of Islamic Studies *	1
	2 Faculty of Public Safety *	1
PRIVATE COLLEGES	1 AAB College	14
	2 RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) College	3
	3 Biznesi College	2
	4 Dardania College	2
	5 Kolegji ESLG	1
	6 Akademia Evolucion	1
	7 International Business College	4
	8 Heimerer College	1
	9 Pjeter Budi College	2
	10 Rezonanca College	1
	11 Riinvest College	4
	12 Tempulli Academy	1
	13 UBT College	16
	14 Universum College	12

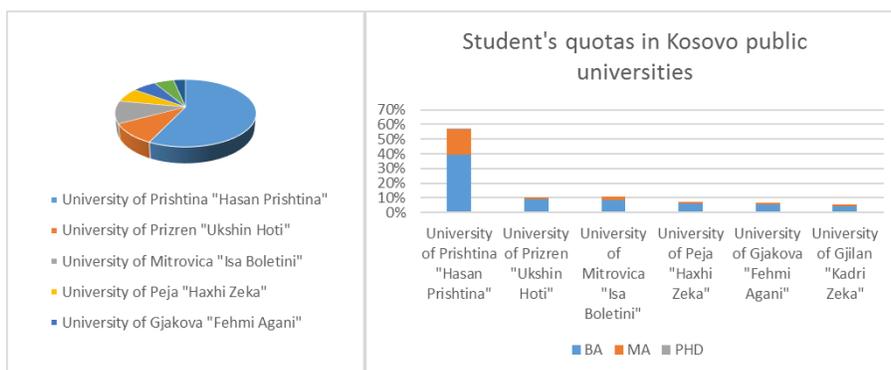
For both private and public providers, the academic programs and student quotas from each provider undergo accreditation by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) as an independent authority that accredits and re-accredits public and private institutions of higher education. For the academic year 2021/22, the following student quotas were accredited.

Table 2. Academic programs and student admission quotas accredited for academic year 2020/2021.

University	Programs quotas				Students quotas			
	BA	MA	PHD	Σ	BA	MA	PHD	Σ
University of Prishtina	66	66	8	140	6242	2733	70	9045
University of Prizren	18	3		21	1445	140		1585
University of Mitrovica	11	7		18	1325	388		1713
University of Peja	9	7		16	965	140		1105
University of Gjakova	8	1		9	825	185		1010
University of Applied Sciences	7	3		10	700	150		850
University of Gjilan	7	5		12	490	30		520
Grand Total	126	92	8	226	11992	3766	70	15828

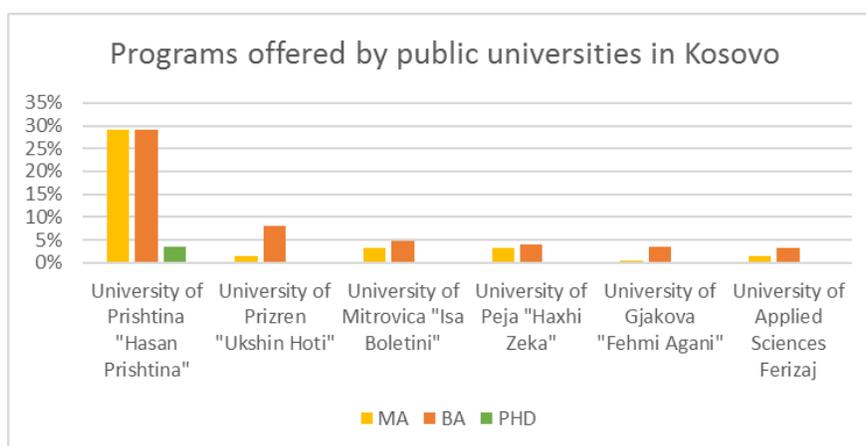
The University of Prishtina leads with several programs and student quotas accredited, 62% of all programs accredited, and 57% of the student admission quota.

Diagram 1. Schematic representation of student admission quotas in public institutions.



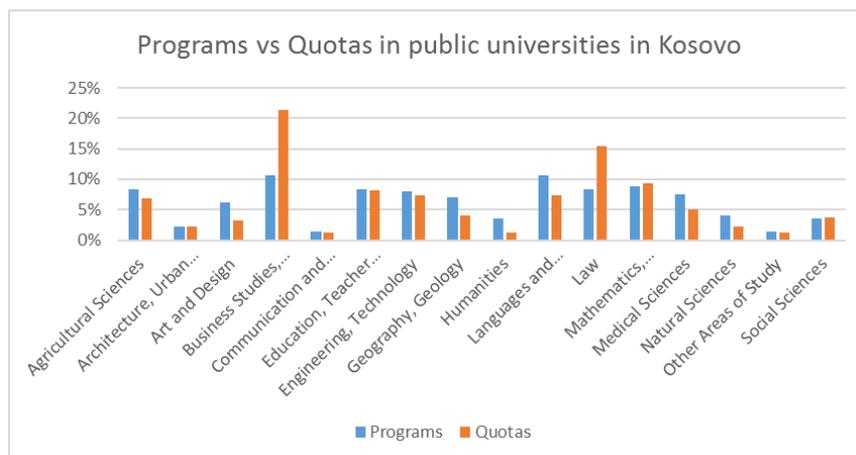
The University of Prishtina is the only university with accredited PhD programs, limited to 70 PhD students in 8 doctoral programs for the academic year 2020/21. For the remaining part of public universities, the rate of programs accredited is below 10%, and student admission quotas are below 11 %. While the University of Prishtina has a similar rate of programs accredited in BA and MA studies, bachelor programs predominate in other public universities

Diagram 2. Schematic representation of academic programs accredited.



In further analysis, data were plotted against the subject area according to Erasmus Subject Area Codes. According to the results obtained, the largest number of programs are offered in Business and Management (11%) and Languages and philological sciences (11%), while the largest student admission quotas are in Business and Management (21%) and Law sciences (16%).

Diagram 3. Schematic representation of academic programs and student quotas accredited filtered classified according to Erasmus Subject Area Codes (ESAC).



Public higher institutions in north macedonia

Currently, there are 6 public universities in North Macedonia with the University of St. Cyril and Methodius being the largest provider; 1(one) public/private and 15 private higher education institutions (Table 1).

Table 3. List of higher education institutions in North Macedonia.

Type of Higher Education Institution	Institution Name	Number of academic units/ departments
PUBLIC	1 St. Cyril and Methodius University - Skopje	24
	2 St. Clemente of Ohrid University - Bitola	12
	3 University of Tetova	13
	4 Gotse Delchev University - Shtip	15
	5 St. Paul The Apostle University of Information Science and	4
	6 Mother Theresa University - Skopje	5
PUBLIC/PRIVATE	1 South East European University - Tetovo	5
PRIVATE	1 International Vision University - Gostivar	6
	2 University American College - Skopje	6
	3 European University Republic of Macedonia - Skopje	5
	4 FON University - Skopje	8
	5 International Balkan University - Skopje	7
	6 University of Tourism and Management - Skopje	6
	7 University of Audiovisual Arts, European Film Academy	3
	8 Eurobalkan University- Skopje	1
	9 Intenational of University of Struga	4
	10 MIT University - Skopje	7
	11 International Slavic University	5
	12 Business Economy High Professional School - Skopje	1
	13 High Professional School Business Academy Smilevski	1
	14 Business High Professional School Eurocollege - Kumanovo	1
	15 High Professional School of Journalism and Public Relation	1

In North Macedonia, the Agency for Quality in Higher Education of the Republic of North Macedonia (AQHE) has been established for accreditation and reaccreditation of higher education institutions, there is no website of the agency, nor accreditation could have been obtained. In the lack of such official data, we have relied on calls for enrollment from each public university, assuming the programs offered, and admission quotas have been validated by their respective accreditation agency.

Table 4. Academic programs and student admission quotas accredited for academic year 2020/2021.

Universities	Programs quotas				Students quotas			
	BA	MA	PHD	Σ	BA	MA	PHD	Σ
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University	272	184	62	518	11652	5595	1529	18776
University of Tetova	163	9	4	176	3554	1522		5076
Goce Delcev University	78	78		156	3249	1067	134	4450
Ss. Kliment Ohridski	50	49	24	123	2718	550	352	3620
Mother Theresa University	23	13		36	1390	241		1631
St. Paul The Apostle University	9	2		11	390	75		465
Grand Total	595	335	90	1020	22953	9050	2015	34018

In some calls for enrollment, the number of students' admission quotas does accurately sum up to a total number of students' admission quotas, therefore slight deviations may be possible.

Diagram 4. Schematic representation of students' admission quotas in public institutions.

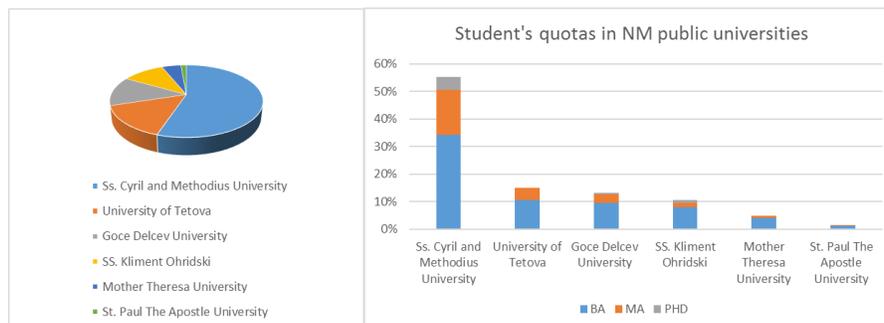
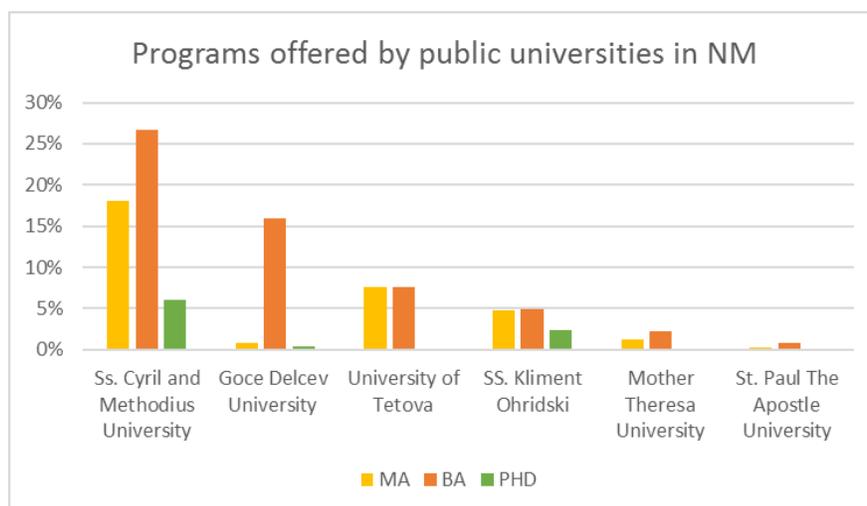


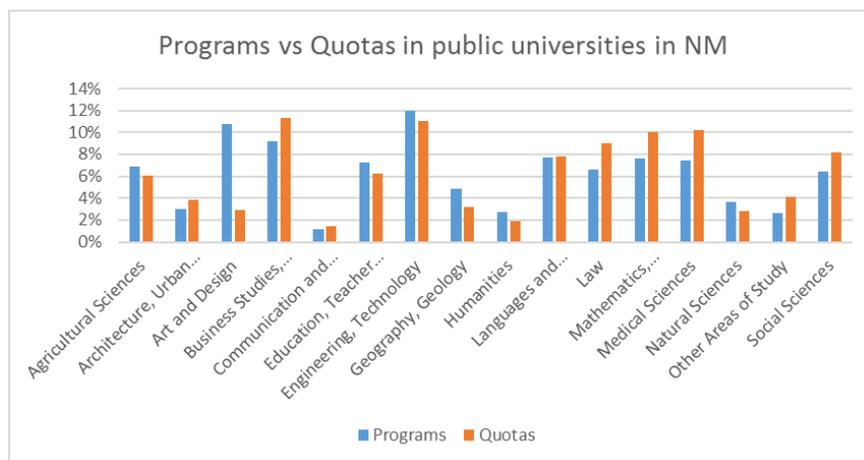
Diagram 5. Schematic representation of academic programs accredited.



Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje is the leader in both, students' admission quotas (55% of all public universities), and the range of academic programs offered (total 51%, BA 27%, MA 18%, and PhD 6%).

When data were plotted against the subject area according to Erasmus Subject Area Codes. According to the results obtained, the largest number of programs are offered in Engineering (12%) and Art and Design (11%), while the largest students' admission quotas are in Business and Management (11%), Engineering (11%) and Informatics (10%) and Medical Sciences(10%).

Diagram 6. Schematic representation of academic programs and student quotas accredited filtered classified according to Erasmus Subject Area Codes (ESAC).



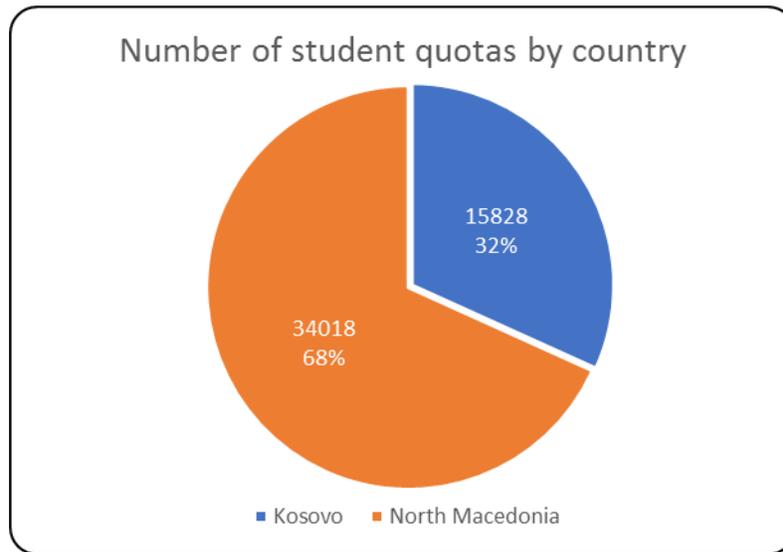
Kosovo versus north macedonia

The results from both countries, Kosovo and North Macedonia were crossmatched for comparison of students' admission quota and academic program rate.

Table 4. Number of students' admission quotas in both countries.

Country	Number of students	
Kosovo	15828	32%
North Macedonia	34018	68%
Total	49846	100%

Diagram 7. Number of students' admission quotas in both countries

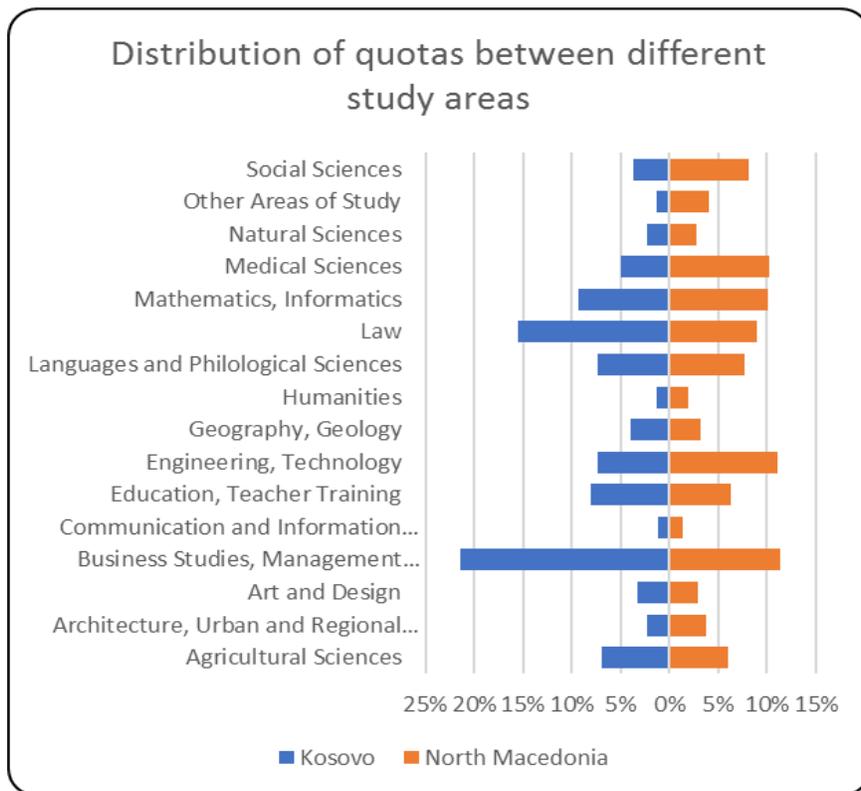


Students' admission quotas were further crossmatched according to subject area codes. While in Kosovo's public higher education institutions only Business and management and Law studies have two-digit shares, in North Macedonia, students' quotas are more uniformly distributed across other subject areas, with Business and Management, Engineering, Informatics, and Medical Sciences leading with two-digit shares.

Table 5. Students' distribution across different areas of study.

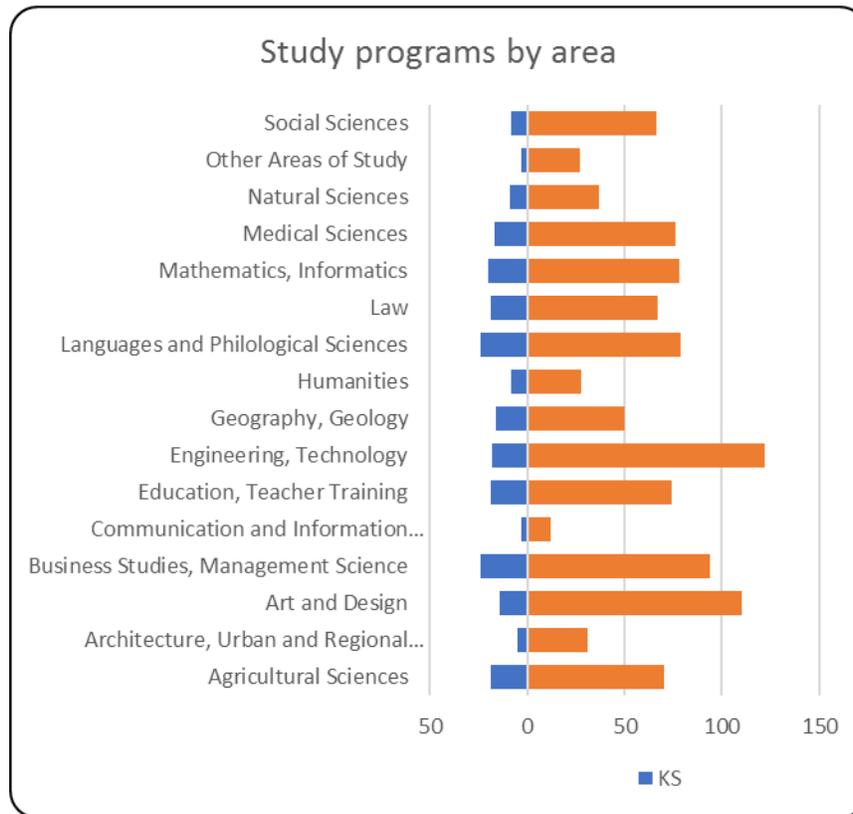
No	ESAC	Students distribution			
		Kosovo		North Macedonia	
1	Agricultural Sciences	1085	7%	2053	6%
2	Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning	360	2%	1291	4%
3	Art and Design	506	3%	988	3%
4	Business Studies, Management Science	3390	21%	3854	11%
5	Communication and Information Sciences	192	1%	484	1%
6	Education, Teacher Training	1285	8%	2128	6%
7	Engineering, Technology	1170	7%	3760	11%
8	Geography, Geology	630	4%	1088	3%
9	Humanities	200	1%	660	2%
10	Languages and Philological Sciences	1155	7%	2642	8%
11	Law	2455	16%	3060	9%
12	Mathematics, Informatics	1485	9%	3424	10%
13	Medical Sciences	785	5%	3465	10%
14	Natural Sciences	355	2%	963	3%
15	Other Areas of Study	195	1%	1390	4%
16	Social Sciences	580	4%	2768	8%
Total		15828	100%	34018	100%

Diagram 8. Schematic representation of academic programs and student quotas accredited filtered classified according to Erasmus Subject Area Codes (ESAC) for Kosovo and North Macedonia



Data were crossmatched further in terms of program diversity across subject fields. In Kosovo public higher institutions were in total 226 academic programs at all three levels, in North Macedonia, there are 1021. Although the difference is extremely high, it should be noted that public universities in North Macedonia quite often offer the same academic program in two versions: congested (3 years in length for BA or 1 year for MA), or extended (4 years in length for BA or 2 years for MA). Furthermore, some academic programs are offered by more than one university, or programs are offered in combined forms. As universities in both Kosovo and North Macedonia, do not use the international qualification coding system i.e. ISCED, it is difficult to extract unique study programs.

Diagram 9. Students' distribution across different areas of study



Main findings and discussion

The study yielded several significant findings that contribute to our understanding of the current professional qualifications provided by higher education institutions in Kosovo and the Republic of North Macedonia. The main findings are as follows:

1. **Student Admission Quota Disparity:** North Macedonia has a considerably higher student admission quota compared to Kosovo, with 68% of new students admitted in North Macedonia versus 32% in Kosovo, which translated to North Macedonia having more than double the number of new students compared to Kosovo. This difference highlights the varying levels of demand for higher education in these regions and emphasizes the need for a careful assessment of the resources and capacities of educational institutions to accommodate these admission numbers.
2. **Program Diversity:** The number of unfiltered academic programs in North Macedonia is significantly higher than in Kosovo, with 82% of programs in North Macedonia compared to 18% in Kosovo. North Macedonia emerges as the clear leader in terms of program diversity, with a significantly higher number of unfiltered academic programs across various fields compared to Kosovo. This observation suggests that North Macedonian higher education providers are more responsive to the evolving demands of the job market and technological advancements, offering a wider range of academic programs to cater to diverse career pathways. In contrast, Kosovo appears to have a more limited range of programs, indicating a potential need for further expansion and diversification in its higher education offerings.
3. **Disciplinary Preferences:** Kosovo leads in student shares in Business/Management and Law studies, whereas North Macedonia excels in Communication/Information and Engineering sciences. These

disciplinary preferences may reflect the specific socioeconomic needs, industry demands, and cultural factors prevalent in each country. Educational institutions and policymakers need to consider these preferences while designing and adjusting the curriculum to ensure relevance and alignment with the future needs of the respective job markets.

4. **Leading Universities:** In Kosovo, the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" stands out as the dominant institution, hosting a majority of students and offering the highest number of academic programs, with 57% of student shares and 62% of academic programs. Similarly, in North Macedonia, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje emerged as the leading university, with 55% of student shares and 51% of academic programs. These universities play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape and provide a basis for further exploration of their strengths, weaknesses, and potential for collaboration and improvement in their respective countries.
5. **The discrepancy in Ph.D. Programs:** In the academic year 2020/2021, Kosovo had only eight accredited PhD programs with a total of 70 students, while North Macedonia offered 90 PhD programs with 2015 students. This contrast raises concerns about academic inflation and the potential implications for the quality and rigor of PhD education in North Macedonia. Further investigation and discussions are warranted to ensure the sustainable and effective management of PhD programs in both countries.

In summary, this study highlights several critical aspects of the current professional qualifications provided by higher education providers in Kosovo and the Republic of North Macedonia. The identified differences in student admission quotas, program diversity, disciplinary preferences, leading universities, and Ph.D. programs present opportunities for educational stakeholders to enhance collaboration, strengthen curriculum offerings, and align educational programs with market demands. By addressing these findings, policymakers and educational institutions can better prepare students for the evolving needs of the labor market, foster innovation, and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of their respective countries.

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