



Organized Crime in Kosovo: A Comprehensive Analysis of Narcotics and Human Trafficking (2019-2023)

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Abstract

Organized crime poses an imminent threat in our society, driven by the pursuit of rapid wealth and power. The path to amassing large profits in a short time leads to various criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and counterfeit goods, reaching global instances. This research is mainly about the Republic of Kosovo. The intent is to analyze organized crime from 2019 to 2023, taking a comprehensive interest in drug and human trafficking. Post-war countries usually struggle with extensive criminal networks that cause internal turmoil; as seen in Kosovo. Fostering criminal cooperation and battling corruption while providing security and safety remain significant internal issues. Its favorable location along the Balkan route and a pathway to illicit activities driven by criminal groups with destination Europe. Additionally, using a mixed-method approach, the research offers a holistic perspective on the changes over the years, emphasizing key enforcement challenges. It also uncovers how criminal networks take advantage of security challenges and legislative gaps to operate freely. Furthermore, the study concludes that stricter enforcement laws and intensified anti-corruption efforts are urgently needed. Improving security policies and practices, with a focus on greater collaboration with other Balkan countries, enhancing border control, and tightening oversight in northern Kosovo are also priorities. Implementing the proposed measures would improve Kosovo's fight against organized crime and serve as a combat model for other Balkan countries.

Keywords: Kosovo, Balkan route, drug trafficking, human trafficking

Introduction

Post-war countries frequently become hubs for criminal activity, and Kosovo is no exception. Kosovo, a country in southeastern Europe, otherwise known as the Balkan peninsula, served as a transit area for the trafficking and smuggling of people and goods by criminal groups from Asia to Western Europe (Krasniqi, 2016).

Kosovo's position along the Balkan route has become crucial to organized crime, leading to various illicit activities by criminal groups, leading to the investigation of the following research question: How have drug and human trafficking evolved in the last four years, what challenges have been posed, and what actions have been taken against these illicit activities?

Mounting evidence suggests that the transition process is fraught with challenges. (Kurtenbach & Rettberg, 2020, p. 1) Argue that a clean break from violence to stability, theft to production, and repression to democracy remains evasive. This perspective highlights the persistent difficulties in effective governance in post-conflict countries and their efforts to have accountability. Similarly, seen from a criminal perspective, weak and failing states, as well as conflict regions, have traditionally been considered crime-facilitative environments (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

Criminal networks usually target countries with weak legal frameworks and weak security enforcement, and they take into consideration the country's political state, meaning political tensions. Internally, Kosovo faces several challenges with organized crime, which is present in various forms; according to UNODC's research on measuring organized crime in Western Balkans, it includes not only drug trafficking but also trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, firearms trafficking, money laundering, and corruption. Among these illegal activities, narcotics trafficking remains the most profitable one, where the interest of criminal groups lies the most.

To combat organized crime, it is crucial to know the characteristics of organized crime. Therefore, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the models of organized criminal groups can be grouped into three general types: groups with hierarchical or organizational structure, groups based on local cultural or ethnic connections, and groups relying on economic business-type relationships. Further, Abadinsky (1994) defines organized crime as having several features: limited membership, hierarchical structure, non-ideological nature, self-perpetuating nature, willingness to use violent means and illegal acts, specialization of roles, and precise regulation.

Abadinsky's definition of organized crime suggests that positions in the group are assigned depending on kinship or friendship. So, developing defense mechanisms requires understanding the depth of these groups. In this case, it is essential to study these criminal groups further by showing a particular interest in their characteristics and ways of operating. Furthermore, different groups have different characteristics worldwide, but what characterizes the Kosovan groups is more interesting; other groups might see other criminal networks as rivals, but the Balkan groups are more than open to collaboration and believe that there is a place for everyone.

Meanwhile, according to Haziri (2017, p. 40), criminal organizations in Kosovo are characterized by ethnic homogeneity, reliance on friendship ties, and readiness to cooperate with other regional criminal groups to expand their enterprises. The highlight is that they act with less caution but greater violence, resorting to the use of firearms to overcome obstacles. So, as these groups are less territorial but highly dangerous, it is necessary to understand the depth of these criminal networks. Understanding their impact over the last four years is crucial to knowing whether these illicit activities have progressed or regressed.

The paper argues that the Balkan route directly impacts Kosovo's inner challenges, highlighting the need for effective preventive mechanisms.

By examining the situation concerning organized crime in Kosovo over the last four years, we can understand the challenges and further provide suggestions to improve security and stability in Kosovo and the Balkans.

Methods

The research has various objectives, including examining organized crime over the last four years. By comparing the results, the aim is to provide a clear version of these illicit activities and their effect on internal stability and socio-economic situation.

Secondly, the purpose is to examine the crime rates in the last four years to comprehend the gaps and advancements in the protective system and further suggest defensive strategies to enhance stability within Kosovo regarding drug and human trafficking.

Furthermore, by emphasizing a mixed-methods approach, it was possible to provide a better understanding of the current challenges by comparing and incorporating document analysis, data analysis, and statistical analysis.

The qualitative method was applied by systematically reviewing documents to provide information by measuring the evolution of organized crime. Additionally, a legal analysis was conducted by researching academic literature, different reports, media articles, and previous research in the field.

The legal analysis aims to assess the effectiveness of the law and understand the potential gaps in the legal framework.

This analysis provided a better understanding of the legal context and evaluated the legal framework in the last four years. Further, statistical analysis was applied using quantitative methods, which provided a numerical analysis of crime statistics and empirical evidence on the prevalence of organized crime in Kosovo.

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods and data integration provided a holistic view of organized crime. Also, examining criminal cases is necessary to comprehend the advancements made within criminal networks.

Results

As defined, criminal groups tend to operate freely in countries with gaps in the legal framework, political turbulences, insufficient protective measures, and inadequate border control.

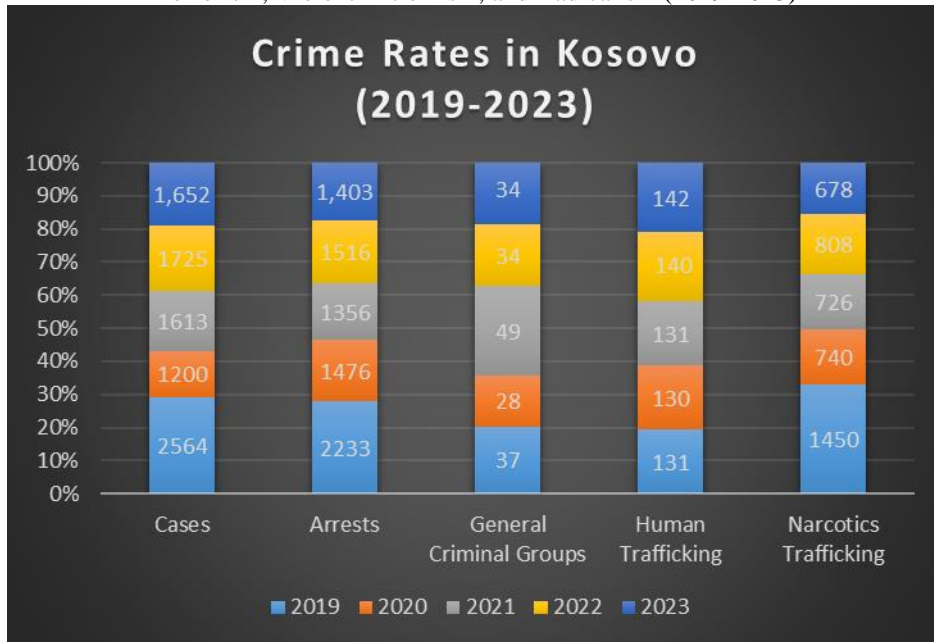
Therefore, cooperating in illegal activities is more accessible and creates an efficient and successful "illicit enterprise. "Understanding Kosovo's crime rates through 2019-2023 is essential to comprehending whether and what has changed. It is necessary to glimpse the past and examine the progress of these criminal groups to understand the current situation.

By studying the crime rates from 2019 to the end of 2023, we can determine the effectiveness of the police forces and their crime prevention strategies. Furthermore, it influences the local economy if there are high crime rates by deterring potential investments, leading to money laundering and the economy collapsing.

Evaluating policy and decision-making can help governments and law enforcement agencies develop strategies, create policies, allocate more current resources, and signal a need for reform or new strategies.

The police's annual report provides crime rates through the years and shows the current situation. Additionally, the interviews with police members offered valuable insights into practice realities, making it easier to understand the present circumstances.

Figure 1: Crime Rates of Organized crime, Serious crimes, Economic and Corruption, Terrorism, Violent Extremism, and Radicalism (2019-2023)



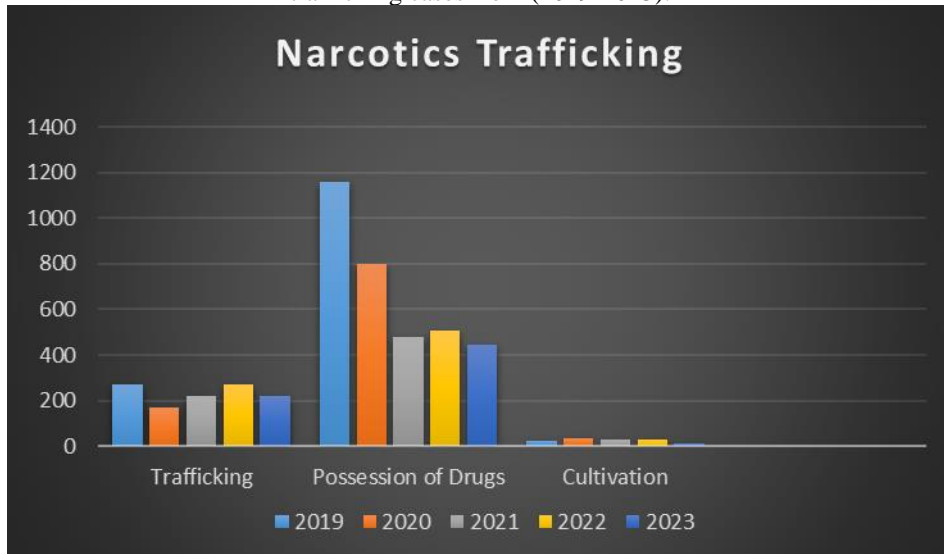
Note: Data compiled from the Annuals of Police Work in Kosovo from 2019-2023 (Kosovo Police, 2019-2023)

Figure 1 demonstrates the number of criminal cases and arrests related to Kosovo crimes from 2019- 2023. The categories provided in the data reflect the police efforts to combat organized crime, which include organized crime, serious crimes, economic crimes, corruption, terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalism.

Critical observations from the analysis of Figure 1 show that narcotics trafficking consistently occurred over the years in the highest numbers, while human trafficking ranks second. Other forms of trafficking, such as arms and illegal goods, follow closely behind. There is a clear dominance of narcotics-related cases.

Therefore, the broader crime landscape in Kosovo is significant to see just why exactly are narcotics in the first place in the crime rate from 2019 to 2023. The high number of narcotic cases, as being first ranked, indicates that narcotics are the primary focus of organized crime groups, which correlates with Kosovo's position as the key transit hub in the Western Balkan.

Figure 2: Crime threat assessment—organized and serious crimes—showing narcotics trafficking cases from (2019-2023).



Note: Data compiled from the Crime Threat Assessment—organized and serious crimes—showing narcotics trafficking cases from 2019-2021. Meanwhile, the 2022-2023 data compiled from the Annuals of Police Work in Kosovo (Kosovo Police, 2019–2023)

Figure 2 illustrates the narcotics trafficking cases from 2019 to 2023 by highlighting the influence of organized transnational crime in the region and also the integration into international trafficking networks. The rise in cultivation cases, particularly in 2020, directly indicates the growing focus on local production.

While narcotics possession cases were approximately 802 cases and 170 human trafficking cases, suggesting that during the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal groups capitalized more on the global disruption, particularly by enhancing their cultivation operations and operating less with human trafficking.

The data further indicates that police control and border control during COVID-19 made it more challenging for human trafficking. Further, providing clear information indicates better trafficking of narcotics across borders, while human trafficking was in a more difficult situation due to movement regulations.

Figure 3: Cases of drug confiscation (2019-2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Heroin	7.7 kg	8.9 kg	3.6 kg	246.6 kg	2.8 kg
Cocaine	1.58 kg	2.66 kg	414.95 kg	4.16 kg	5.5 kg
Marijuana	824.2 kg	256.7 kg	499.5 kg	662,69 kg	601.1 kg
Cannabis	25 kg	0.749 kg	0.026 kg	24.51 kg	21.98 kg

Note: The data compiled the cases of confiscation of narcotics: source crime threat assessment-organized and serious crimes-(2019-2021) and (2022-2023) data from the Annuals of Police Work in Kosovo (Kosovo Police, 2019-2023)

The data provided in Figure 3 show significant changes, starting with heroin, which had a drastic increase in number, reaching 246.6 kg, compared to the other years. However, the change in 2023 suggests more enhanced protective measures for the police or improvements for traffickers who avoid using techniques against police.

In the following, the cocaine's improvement in 2021, with 414,95 kg, indicating an influx in the region. This pattern may portray shifting dynamics in trafficking routes or successful police work, which is similar to heroin in 2022, which could suggest increased cultivation. While also suggesting the stable flow of marijuana trafficking.

Furthermore, cannabis trafficking and seeing the minimal amounts suggest either changing preferences in drug use or shifts in law enforcement focus, which might also indicate better profiting with other kinds of drugs. Therefore, it is necessary to know more about the drug prices in Kosovo to have a clearer vision of profiting from this illicit activity and comprehend the shift in the interest in drugs.

While analyzing multiple sources to comprehend the flow of drug prices in Kosovo, comparing the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime and GI TOC SEE's Observatory provides a more explicit version of the current state of the prices. By examining these different datasets, we can identify trends, discrepancies, and regional variations in drug pricing, which are critical for understanding the dynamics of the illicit drug market in Kosovo.

Figure 4: shows drug prices based on data from analyzing people, drugs, and money flow in the Western Balkans (2021). (f.4).

Marijuana	Retail Market	1 gr = 5-7€
	Wholesale market	1 kg = 900- 1300€
	Grown indoors:	1 kg = 2.300- 2.600 €
Cocaine Crack cocaine	Retail Market	1 gr = 35-50 €
	Wholesale market	1 kg = 40.000-50.000 €
	(to smoke)	0.2 gr = 20-25 €

Note: Data compiled on drug prices 2021 from the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime-Analysis of people, drugs, and money flow in the Western Balkans

For clarification: The difference between Cocaine and Crack Cocaine: Cocaine is a highly addictive stimulant drug made from the dried leaves of the coca plant, which is native to South America. Crack cocaine stems from the coca plant, but the outcome is when powder cocaine is processed into a solid form so that it can be smoked (Hodgman K, M., 2021).

Figure 5: Drug prices in Kosovo 2021/2022 (f.5).

Substance	Quantity	Price/€	Information by	Region/Hotspots	Year
Cannabis	1 kg	€400 – €600		North Kosovo	2021
Cannabis	1 g	5 €		North Kosovo	2021
Cannabis	1 kg	€800 – €1000		North Kosovo	2021
Cannabis	1 g	€2.80 – €3	Journalist	Prizren	2021
Cannabis	1 g	€5 – €10	Police		2021
Cannabis	1 kg	€600 – €700	Police	Podujevo	2021
Cannabis	1 kg	€1 600 – €1 700	Albanian Police		2021
Cannabis	1kg	€2 500 – €3 000	Police		2021
Skunk (Cannabis)	1kg	€800 – €1000		North Kosovo	2021
Cocaine	1g	€60 – €70		North Kosovo	2021
Cocaine	1 kg	€45.000 – €50.00		North Kosovo	2021
Cocaine	1 g	€80 – €100	Journalist	Prizren	2021
Cocaine	1 kg	€50 000 – €70 000	Police		2021
Cocaine	0.6 g	€50 – €70	Police		2021
Ecstasy	One pill	€1.7 – €2.5		North Kosovo	2021
Ecstasy	One pill	€5 – €10	Police		2021
Heroin	0.25 g	€5			2021
Heroin	1 kg	€12 000 – €13 000		North Kosovo	2021
Heroin	1 kg	€5 000		North Kosovo	2021
Heroin	0.6 g	€20 – €30	Police		2021
Heroin	1 kg	€20 000 – €25 000	Police		2021
Heroin	1 kg	€18 000 – €21 000	Albanian Police		2021

Note: Data compiled on drug prices 2021/2022 by GI TOC SEE's Observatory, 2021

So, by analyzing both sources on drug prices from 2021, the marijuana prices are 1 gr- 5 € on the retail market from the first source from f.4, while on the second (f.5), it is North Kosovo. The difference in the price of marijuana lies in the region of sale, thus showing that in North Kosovo, the price is 5 €; meanwhile, in the city of Prizren, the price is 2.80–3.00 €. Marijuana in the wholesale market for 1 kg costs 900–1300 €. By wholesale market, it meant buying the drugs in large quantities.

By analyzing the data from GI TOC SEE, the price for 1 kg of marijuana can go around 400-600 € or 800-1000 € in North Kosovo, 600-700 € in Podujevo, 1.600-1.700 € - 2.500-3.000 € by the information of Albanian Police, while from the first analysis from the report from the global initiative against transnational organized crime, it is stated the price for grown indoors cannabis is 2.300-2.600 €. The higher prices of cannabis indicate the indoors grown, so the lower prices dictate the outdoor cannabis, demonstrating a

competitive and fragmented market that local cultivation and law enforcement practices may influence.

Globally, the growth in indoor cannabis cultivation has surpassed that of outdoor cultivation, and thus, there is an increasing demand for cannabis cultivated indoors in Kosovo, Europe, and elsewhere (UNODC, 2022). The demand for potent strains, such as Skunk cannabis priced at 800-1000€ per kg, indicates a shift toward more robust products.

Figure 6. A cannabis laboratory located near the northern Izvor border crossing point in Kosovo



Kosovo Police. (2023). Cannabis lab. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Available at: <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/see-obs-015/images/web/cannabis-lab.jpg> (Accessed 19.08.2024)

The prices of retail cocaine were variable depending on the territory where they were selling per gram; they were from 35–50 € per gram (within the territory of Kosovo controlled thoroughly by Kosovo police), while in North Kosovo, the prices were from 60–70 € per gram, indicating a premium for this market.

Furthermore, the prices of wholesale cocaine range from 40.000 to 50.000€ per kilogram, highlighting its high value for traffickers and furthering their interest in dealing with cocaine. The difference between cocaine and crack cocaine provides the interest and demand as well as the market's willingness to pay differently for different kinds of quality drugs.

The primary difference between crack cocaine and cocaine is the demand and the market's willingness to pay more for drug quality and that the criminal organizations in Kosovo are staying aligned with global drug trends, indicating that well-informed criminal enterprises manage these operations.

In conclusion, Figures 4 and 5 show that the evolving narcotics market in Kosovo is complex and characterized by price differences, mainly between Kosovo in general and dividing with the prices in the Northern part. What is also very interesting is the shift toward indoor cultivation; this further indicates the ability of these criminal groups to adapt to new trends and respond to market demands, highlighting their capacity and flexibility to maintain a strong position in illegal markets and demonstrating that these criminal organizations are well-informed about global developments and possess significant capabilities to organize and execute large illicit operations. Their ability to shift methods and incorporate new substances in line with market demand showcases high sophistication and professionalism in conducting illegal business.

High narcotic prices directly create profiting opportunities for criminal networks, making it easier for them to use corruption as a mechanism of operating freely. Therefore, it shapes the inner situation and the local economy and harms the broader socio-economic conditions.

The need for drug reports from 2019-2021 in Kosovo limits the knowledge of the exact prices for these years. According to the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), the prices of heroin in Europe did not change much. What changed was the slight decrease in purity since 2019, which was probably due to supply disruption arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions. However, price and purity varied widely, both within and between countries. The Western Balkans showed their involvement from 2019 to the end of 2023 and are still following up with their operation in 2024. As described by Global Initiative, the Western Balkans remain a central transit region.

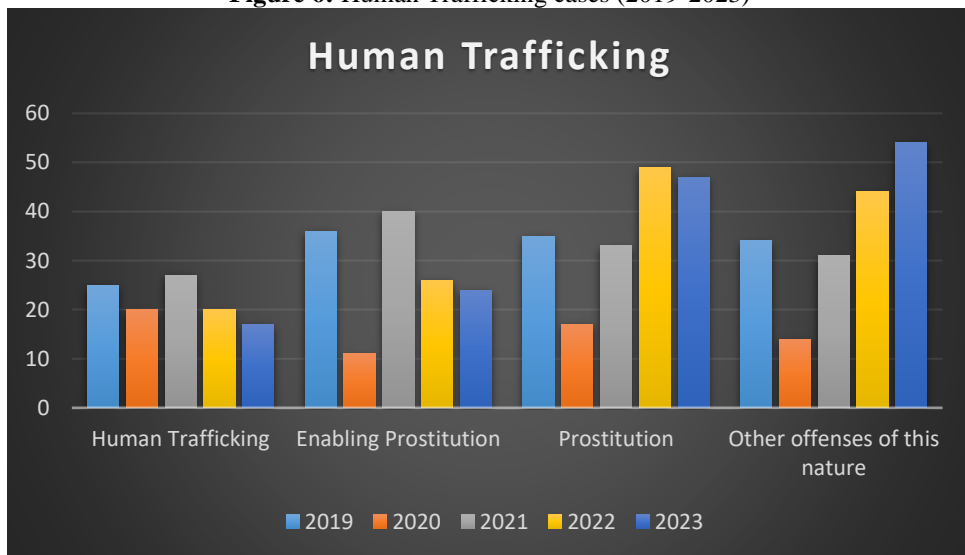
The six countries of the Western Balkans remain a central transit region for the trafficking of cannabis and heroin and, increasingly, cocaine and synthetic drugs. Recent seizures show how drugs are brought to the area, stored (usually near logistics centers), cut, repackaged, and distributed to markets further afield (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2024).

Therefore, the 'Balkan route' continues to function as a pivotal transit zone for various drugs and, lastly, as a source of synthetic drugs, human trafficking, and other illicit activities. Following the recent reports of 2024, it is clear that the Balkan route exists and functions well with illicit operations led by sophisticated criminal groups. Coinciding with the recent report of

EUDA& Europol, where, in addition, criminal networks originating from or linked to the Western Balkan region appear to maintain their role in the supply and distribution of heroin in the EU. While some may be involved in the wholesale trafficking of heroin in the EU, most appear to be active in trafficking and distribution across EU Member States or in providing logistical services, such as storage and transportation. These criminal networks were linked to other drug trafficking activities and large-scale trafficking of firearms to the EU (European et al. Agency & Europol, 2023).

In the country of Kosovo, from the crime rate analysis, human trafficking ranks in second place within the list of ratings. Therefore, it concerns security and safety within Kosovo and cross-border trafficking. The data analyzed provides a comprehension of human trafficking cases from 2019 to 2023. Recently, at the end of 2023, through the report of the police of Kosovo, it was stated that by combating human trafficking, which ranks second among illegal activities, during the year 2023, registering 142 cases, arresting 199 suspects, and also filing 81 criminal charges against 128 suspected persons, filling 46 charge sheets for offenses against 96 persons, identifying 33 victims of trafficking while assisting 58 (Kosovo Police, 2023).

Figure 6: Human Trafficking cases (2019-2023)



Note: Crime threat assessment-Organized and Serious crimes show human trafficking cases from 2019-2021. Meanwhile, the 2022-2023 data is from the Annuals of Police Work in Kosovo (Kosovo Police, 2019–2023).

By analyzing the data and presenting the following result, the growing trend of human trafficking cases proves the challenge of combating organized crime and taking into consideration the state of the victims.

Following the data analysis, between 2022 and 2023, prostitution had more significant numbers. There is a slight decrease in 2023, making it a concerning matter and supporting the activity of criminal operations. In 2021, enabling prostitution shows the highest outburst, which changes from 2020, indicating that in 2020, due to the restrictions due to COVID-19, it was not possible to work as freely as wished by these illicit groups.

The other offenses of this nature uphold the current rates in human trafficking, with the most significant numbers in 2023, indicating a shift of interest and upholding the line of illicit activities, followed closely by prostitution. The data suggests that in 2022-2023, there was a marked rise in interest in both prostitution and other offenses of this nature.

Figure 7: The crime rate cases communicated directly by the Police of the Republic of Kosovo, in coherence with Article 277 of CODE NO—06/L-074 (personal communication, September 19, 2024).

	Number of Cases
2019	3
2020	5
2021	7
2022	5
2023	7

The figure provides the number of cases required by Article 277 of Criminal Law in the Republic of Kosovo. The authorities of the Republic of Kosovo personally communicated the data displayed in the table. They confirmed that they work by the provisions of Article 277 of the Criminal Law, as outlined in Code No. 06/L-074.

Where according to Code No. 06/L-074 of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 277, participating in or organizing an organized criminal group is defying as follows:

1. Anyone who willfully and with knowledge of the purpose and general activity of the organized criminal group or the intention of the group to commit one or more criminal acts which are punishable by a maximum penalty of at least four (4) years or more actively participating in the criminal activities of the group, knowing that such participation will contribute to the realization of the criminal activities of the group, shall be punished by a fine of up to two hundred fifty-thousand (250,000) Euros and imprisonment of at least seven (7) years.
2. Anyone who organizes, establishes, supervises, manages, or directs the activities of the group of organized crime is punishable by a fine of up to five hundred thousand (500,000) euros and imprisonment of at least ten (10) years.

3. When the activities of the organized criminal group provided for in paragraphs 1. or 2. of this article result in death, the perpetrator is punished with a fine of up to five hundred thousand (500,000) Euros and imprisonment of at least ten (10) years or life imprisonment.
4. The court can mitigate the sentence of the member of the organized criminal group who, before the group criminal organized to have committed the criminal offense, reports to the police or prosecutor the existence and formation and provides information about the organized criminal group in sufficient detail for it enables the arrest or prosecution of such a group.
5. For this article, "actively participates" includes, but is not limited to, the provision of information or material means, recruitment of new members, and all forms of financing of group activities (CODE NO. 06/L-074, 2019).

Based on the data provided by the personal communication with the Kosovo police, the number of cases is conducted following Article 277 of Criminal Law, suggesting that it is somewhat more challenging to detect human trafficking operations.

It raises the possibility that criminal groups exercise greater caution and operate more discreetly to avoid law enforcement authorities.

These criminal groups prefer cash transactions over banking channels, eliminating the possibility of leaving traces, ascending with Friedrich Schneider's assertion that most illegal transactions are in cash due to the reduced risk of detection (Schneider, 2020; United et al. on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

Operating with cash as a transaction method provides a safe net of no traceable funds. So, rather than being seen as a vulnerability, it is wise to use cash rather than the Internet for financial operations.

Meanwhile, according to the EU World Bank Report 2020, money laundering also has a solid connection. Balkan criminal networks are notably a part of these illicit activities, where transnational organized crime groups in the Western Balkans cause significant financial harm in their countries of origin. Further, the institutions that are still in the state-building process have difficulties providing adequate rule of law implementations, as well as organized crime, which are vital structural constraints to job creation and economic transformation of the region's six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo (European Parliament, 2021).

While conceding with the report of the global illicit findings of 2023, where Europe shows the most significant continental increase in criminality, while resilience has grown only marginally, this also implicates the Balkan

countries, where noting that continents that have previously shown high levels of resilience are assessing as vulnerable to organized crime, with Europe being an excellent example. Although the inclusion of new indicators has certainly affected criminality scores, the original ten markets have increased in their own right, worsening the criminality environment on the continent.

However, while criminality is genuinely pervasive and affects the entire continent, albeit to a different extent, there is a clear division in levels of resilience. There is an apparent East-West divide, with Eastern European countries still struggling to shake off their authoritarian legacies, which have defined organized crime dynamics and resilience frameworks, or the lack thereof, for the past three decades (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023).

The grave situation of the Western Balkans between 2021 and 2023 clearly shows that money laundering exists due to organized crime, which hinders countries' economies.

Therefore, the advances of criminal networks toward online banking and other ways of the Internet sphere would make it even harder for Kosovo to keep track of the money movement within the country, which would also provide more opportunities for money laundering and harm the country's economy. Additionally, it is crucial to adapt law enforcement strategies to counter the evolving money laundering tactics, just as in the West, where tactics are usually organized based on the towns in Kosovo from which the criminal members come.

According to the European Commission's 2023 report, Kosovo remains in the early stages of its fight against organized crime, with limited progress in investigating and prosecuting cases. Even though Kosovo has adopted a new police organizational structure and improved its intelligence and analytical capacities, these developments have yet to fully translate into practical action. Despite ongoing law enforcement operations, the powerful tools outlined in the Criminal Code and the Law on extended confiscation powers do not coincide with the desired results. Additionally, combating organized crime in the northern region of Kosovo continues to pose significant challenges (European Commission, 2023).

It indicates the current struggle with investigating and prosecuting cases. Additionally, it highlights that the legal framework for extended confiscation powers has yet to be established and applied.

The situation in the northern region remains challenging, further complicating the country's political situation. In particular, the challenges concern the rule of law and controlling the area. The efforts to restrain criminality should address the structural weaknesses in governance, financial regulation, and law enforcement to provide a progressive and strategic

system of combating organized crime—structural weaknesses in governance, financial regulation, and law enforcement create overall instability.

Discussion

Analyzing crime rates in Kosovo from 2019 to 2023, it is evident that narcotics trafficking remains a predominant issue. Significant increases in cultivation and trafficking cases during this period are further present even in 2024. This trend aligns with the findings of the European Commission (2023), which highlight Kosovo's ongoing struggle against organized crime despite persistent governance challenges.

The high crime rates of narcotics possession and trafficking justify the need for legal enforcement and the use of the legal framework provided by the Criminal Code more effectively. Moreover, the growing reliance on cash transactions complicates detection efforts, as Schneider (2010) emphasized.

As Kosovo continues to navigate these challenges, a multidimensional approach that includes regional cooperation will be essential in combating organized crime. Further, analyzing the human trafficking situation in Kosovo and its growing trend proves a concerning situation. Vulnerable populations, particularly those facing socio-economic hardships, are at heightened risk of exploitation. In this case, Kosovo, just as listed above, is still in the state-building process and faces socio-economic difficulties.

Therefore, the existing legal framework presents challenges, with law enforcement agencies often lacking the necessary resources and training to combat trafficking effectively. Moreover, the complex nature of trafficking routes highlights the problem's transnational nature, necessitating a collaborative approach across borders; the targeted policy measures must address the underlying vulnerabilities and enhance victim support services.

Furthermore, analyzing the crime rates in Kosovo reinforced the assertion that the situation has slightly changed over the past four years, echoing the findings of the European Commission's 2023 report. This stagnation highlights the urgent need for effective interventions and comprehensive strategies to address the region's entrenched challenges of organized crime.

The research's findings have significant implications for Kosovo's policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and community safety initiatives. As organized crime continues to thrive amidst persistent governance challenges, policymakers must prioritize the development and enforcement of robust legal frameworks that address both narcotics and human trafficking.

Enhanced training and resources for law enforcement are more than essential in combating these illegal activities, while community engagement strategies must be applied to support vulnerable populations and prevent exploitation. Ultimately, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is vital to fostering a safer environment and promoting long-term stability in Kosovo.

Addressing the multifaceted challenges of organized crime in Kosovo, particularly narcotics and human trafficking, is not only essential for the safety and stability of the region but also imperative for the socio-economic development and future resilience of its communities. Kosovo can pave the way toward a more secure and just society by prioritizing effective law enforcement, regional cooperation, and comprehensive support for vulnerable populations.

Limitations in resources made it difficult to provide the exact drug prices for 2019-2021; instead, general data from different reports supported the results. Also, the absence of an annual report of police work from 2020 posed a significant challenge. While it was possible to gather information directly by contacting police authorities in Kosovo, the lack of a yearly report helped speed up the research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has thoroughly examined the evolution of narcotics and human trafficking patterns in Kosovo over the past four years, highlighting significant shifts. The data reveals a concerning increase in narcotics trafficking, particularly in local cultivation and production methods, demonstrating organized crime's adaptability and resilience in the face of law enforcement efforts. The data also indicates that the year with the most significant decrease in human trafficking, based on the data, was 2020; what also makes it more interesting is the presence of COVID-19.

The findings indicate that while there have been advancements in the legal framework and police capabilities, these measures have not kept pace with the sophistication of criminal networks. From the data provided, it is clear the high narcotics possession rate; what also supports this rate is the further development of indoor labs and the transnational nature of trafficking routes, which supports the claim of ongoing challenges of combating organized crime and supports the statement of Balkan routes still being active more than ever. Therefore, it points out the urgent need for enhanced regional cooperation and more strategic developments to safeguard public safety and further address the vulnerabilities that fuel these criminal groups.

By addressing the research question in understanding the differences made in the last four years, this study contributes to a deeper comprehension of the dynamics of narcotics and human trafficking in Kosovo, emphasizing

the necessity for targeted policy interventions and community engagement to demonize these criminal groups.

Kosovo, despite its independence in 2008, remains in the early stages of combating organized crime even now in 2024. Some advances are there, but there is still room for improvement. New policies and better control mechanisms must apply in northern Kosovo. Difficulties controlling northern Kosovo make it easier for criminal networks to operate using alternative routes to cross the border. One urgent obstacle to change is the need to address the underlying economic challenges.

The difficulty of controlling Northern Kosovo makes it easier for criminal groups to operate freely, using alternative routes to cross the border. Kosovo must prioritize citizen safety and address underlying economic challenges.

Ensuring security in Kosovo and providing new cooperation strategies among Balkan countries are urgently needed because the strategies provided have yet to show much progress. The active “Balkan route” shows the necessity for strengthening cross-border security measures.

Furthermore, using cash transactions facilitates money laundering and fosters an environment for criminal enterprises. While criminal groups have outsmarted the law and authorities by shifting from outdoor drug operations to indoor laboratories, showcasing their ability to innovate in response to law enforcement efforts, there is still the effort of the authorities of the Republic of Kosovo to fight against these illicit activities.

In conclusion, Kosovo must work on further developing strategies against organized crime because, until now, it is showing that the improvement could be taking a faster path.

Enhancing collaboration opportunities with neighboring countries and working further on stricter border control is the first step in evolving. The approach has to take direction toward justice and security.

The approach has to emphasize justice and security. Addressing the questions raised in this research requires swift and effective responses to combat the current situation.

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