

Serbia/Kosovo



A protestor wears a shirt reading 'I won't let you poison me' during a rally against plans to start mining lithium in Serbia, in Belgrade, Serbia, August 10, 2024.

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Attacks on journalists, delayed and inefficient war crimes prosecutions, a flawed asylum system, and intolerance and violence against LGBT people remained significant concerns in Serbia in 2024.

The state response to protests and criticism of [planned lithium mining in July and August](#) highlighted weakness in the rule of law, with arrests of activists and smear campaigns [against independent media outlets](#) by state media.

Freedom of Media

Independent journalists were subjected to assaults, threats, including death threats and smearing by pro-government media outlets and high-ranking public officials.

Between January and September, the Independent Journalists' Association recorded 108 incidents against journalists and media outlets, of which 8 were physical attacks, 2 were attacks on property, and 55 involved threats, intimidation and harassment.

In March, the two heads of the Vojvodina Association of Independent Journalists, Dinko Gruhonjic and [Ana Lalić Hegediš](#), were subject to threats and intimidation after speaking at a conference in Croatia. Investigative journalist Gruhonjic was the target of a viral [deepfake video](#) in March in which he appeared to be happy that he shares a first name with Croatian Fascist war criminal Dinko Šakić, resulting in [two criminal complaints against](#) Gruhonjic and several death threats. Journalist [Lalić Hegediš](#) received thousands of threats, including death threats and threats of sexual violence. Both journalists reported the incidents to the police, and police were investigating at time of writing.

In February, *NI Belgrade* newsroom reported several [death threats](#) against its editorial staff to authorities. *NI Belgrade* [has received countless threats](#), including death threats, over the past decade, only a few of which have been prosecuted.

During the year, there was a surge in so-called [SLAPP cases](#) (strategic lawsuits against public participation) [against journalists](#).

As of September, *Krik*, an investigative media outlet, was the [subject of 14 defamation](#) lawsuits, all of which it claims aim to silence its work.

In April, a Belgrade Court of Appeal judge and her husband [filed civil and criminal lawsuits](#) against *Krik* and its journalists. The couple allege the outlet violated their privacy rights when it published a profile of them in a database of judges aimed at highlighting key cases and assets for transparency purposes. All cases were pending at time of writing.

In June, [the Belgrade Court of Appeal](#) upheld a defamation verdict against *Krik* for an article published in December 2021 listing those who had sued the outlet and for a comment by the editor-in-chief in the same issue stating *Krik* was being targeted with SLAPP lawsuits aimed at silencing journalists.

Accountability for War Crimes

Between January and August, the War Crimes Prosecutor's Office launched seven new war crimes investigations involving eight suspects, and three against unknown perpetrators. As of August, 19 cases against 37 defendants were pending before Serbian courts. Proceedings were marred by significant delays.

The High Council of Prosecution [in May appointed a temporary head of war crimes](#) prosecutions following the expiration of the seven-year mandate of acting Chief War Crimes Prosecutor Snezana Stanojkovic. A civil society group that tracks war crimes cases [criticized the lack of progress on war crimes accountability under Stanojkovic's leadership](#).

The war crimes [trial against seven Bosnian Serb ex-policemen](#) accused of killing 1,313 Bosniaks from Srebrenica during the 1995 genocide resumed in September after an 18-month delay. The trial at the Belgrade High Court has repeatedly been postponed since its start in 2017. As of September, only two of eight hearings scheduled for 2024 had actually taken place.

The [trial of Jovan Radan, former member](#) of the Serb-led Territorial Defense force accused of wartime rape in the Vukovar area of Croatia in 1991, started at the Belgrade High Court in July.

The Belgrade Higher Court, in a [retrial](#) in July, convicted Danko Vadicic of murder of an older Bosniak couple in Brod na Drini in August 1992, sentencing him to nine years in prison.

Following a retrial that lasted more than eight years, [the Belgrade Higher Court in April convicted seven](#) and acquitted two former members of a Yugoslav Army Unit of war crimes for their involvement in deadly attacks against civilians in the Peja area of Kosovo between April and May 1999. The commander received a 20-year sentence and others lesser jail terms.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants

The asylum system remained flawed, with asylum seekers facing difficulties accessing procedures, low recognition rates, and long delays. Between January and August, [Serbia granted refugee status](#) or subsidiary protection to only two people. Serbia [granted temporary protection to 880](#), all from Ukraine.

Between January and August, [Serbia registered 511 asylum](#) seekers, and allowed 156 asylum applications to be lodged.

By August, [38 unaccompanied migrant children](#) had been registered with Serbian authorities for the year to date. Serbia lacks formal age assessment procedures for unaccompanied children, putting older children at risk of being treated as adults instead of receiving special protection.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

LGBT people continued to face intolerance, threats, and violence. Between January and September, *Da Se Zna!* recorded 82 incidents of hate motivated incidents against LGBT people, including 28 physical attacks. The Belgrade Pride march took place without incident in September.

People with Disabilities

Children and adults with disabilities continue to be placed in institutional care, and almost 30 percent of children with disabilities who live in institutions are not enrolled in school.

Kosovo



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People take part in the LGBTQ community Pride Parade in Pristina on June 8, 2024, to demand "freedom" and "equal rights" in Kosovo. © 2024 ARMEND NIMANI/AFP via Getty Images

Tensions continued in the north following the closure by Kosovo authorities of [financial institutions, post offices, and five "parallel institutions" tied to Belgrade](#), sparking protests among local Serbs and international criticism.

Twenty-five years after the war, the Kosovo Specialist Chamber in The Hague delivered two judgments and continued proceedings against former Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, and Kosovo courts continued to prosecute war crimes cases.

Journalists continued to face attacks, harassment, and threats, with a poor response from authorities.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [in April recommended](#) that Kosovo become a member.

Accountability for War Crimes

In February, the Pristina Basic Court [convicted former Serbian police officer Dusko Arsić](#) for his role in police and paramilitary ill-treatment, expulsions, and murders of Kosovo Albanian residents of Pristina in 1999. Arsić was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

The Pristina Basic Court in April, in a partial retrial in the “Drenica 1” case, [acquitted Sylejman Selimi and Jahir Demaku](#) of beating a prisoner at a Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) detention center in the village of Likovac in 1998. Their other war crimes convictions still stand.

In July, the Pristina Basic Court [sentenced Muhamet Alidemaj](#), a former Serbian police officer, to 15 years’ imprisonment for war crimes for participating in the massacre of 130 people at Izbice in March 1999.

The Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague in July [found former KLA member Pjeter Shala guilty of war crimes](#), including the murder of one prisoner and the arbitrary detention and torture of at least 18 detainees in the Kukes Metal Factory in Kukes, Albania, between May and June 1999. The court sentenced Shala to 18 years in prison.

In September, the The Court of Appeals Panel at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague [reduced the sentence of KLA commander Salih Mustafa for a second time](#), to 15 years’ imprisonment. Mustafa was convicted in December 2022 by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers for war crimes between 1998 and 2000, including murder, torture, and arbitrary detention.

Accountability for Political Violence

The Pristina Basic Court in June [convicted](#) four Kosovo Serbs—Nedeljko Spasojevic, Marko Rosić, Zarko Jovanović and Dragisa Marković—for the 2018 murder of Oliver Ivanović, a Kosovo Serb opposition politician from North Mitrovica. Sentences ranged between four and 10 years. Police delay in conducting arrests after the sentencing allowed Rosić to evade justice.

Freedom of Media

Journalists continued to be subjected to physical attacks, threats, and obstructions in their work. Between January and September, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AGK) recorded [38 incidents](#) against journalists, including two attacks, two attacks, five death threats and 14 cases of harassment, hate speech, or smear campaigns.

Staff of online investigative news outlet *Insajderi* [received death threats](#) following a June story identifying a man arrested by Kosovo Police for alleged fraud and money laundering.

The Mitrovica Basic Court in September [sentenced a man to four months in prison](#) for threatening a crew from the Balkans Investigative Reporting Network reporting on a proposal to build a Catholic church in the village of Gornja Klina in February.

Women’s Rights

A commission established to grant status and access to monthly funding to survivors of war-time sexual violence [made slow progress](#), with only 2,083 of an estimated 20,000 survivors having applied by June.

A June [report](#) by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitoring domestic violence cases criticized court delays and failures to adhere to procedural deadlines as well as lenient sentencing, with 78 percent of defendants receiving at most a fine or suspended sentence. The report recommended training for all judicial system actors, including specialized training for judges, prosecutors, and attorneys.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Duda Balje, member of the Kosovo parliament and chair of the parliamentary Human Rights Commission, made [discriminatory comments about LGBT people](#) during a parliamentary meeting in February. Local LGBT and human rights organizations [called](#) for her dismissal as chair. In May, the government announced [plans](#) to legalize same-sex civil unions. The legislation had yet to be introduced at time of writing.

Asylum Seekers and Displaced Persons

Between January and August, the Kosovo Ministry of Internal Affairs registered 358 forced returns to Kosovo, the majority from Germany. Sixty-one were children. Of all forcibly returned, nine were Roma, one Bosniak, and the rest ethnic Albanian. During the same reporting period, the ministry registered 33 voluntary returns to Kosovo, and 144 asylum applications, the majority of the latter individuals from Syria.

Accountability of International Institutions

There was no progress in providing reparations or apologies to Kosovo Roma resettled by the UN to now-closed lead contaminated camps after the 1999 war. A flawed UN mechanism to provide compensation has yet to begin operations.