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Migration, Extremism, & Dangerous Blame Games Development & Dynamics in Serbia

This fact sheet aims to provide a succinct conclusion from the RESOLVE Network's Western Balkans Research Initiative on Migration, Extremism, & Dangerous Blame Games Development & Dynamics in Serbia. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants into the European Union (EU) from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa beginning in 2015 coincided with an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric among far-right in many European countries. In 2020, the presence of migrants within the Balkans spurred increased mobilization among far-right actors opposed to their presence in the region. Far-right rhetoric in Serbia remains centered around frustrations with political establishments, ethnic nationalism, and anti-minority sentiments underpinned by concerns about the dilution of the Serbian national identity. The movement of people from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa through the Western Balkans and their protracted displacement in the region created a new phenomenon around which far-right extremists and organizations have been able to organize and mobilize support, both within the region and through strengthened connections with the global far-right.
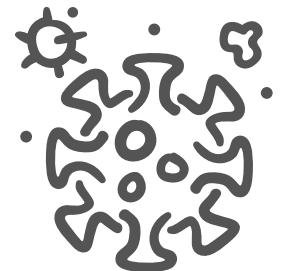
MIGRATION

The extensive migration of people coming into the Western Balkans opened up an opportunity for far-right actors in Serbia to connect to global far-right anti-immigration extremist rhetoric and agendas.

COVID-19

Serbia's strict measures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 disproportionately affected migrants and refugees. The Serbian Army was deployed to guard asylum centers and the Serbian President justified this as providing "protection" to local populations and the People's Patrol (Narodne Patrole) a racist, far-right organization, implemented their own "protection" measures.

EUROSCEPTICISM

The "migration crisis" in combination with the pandemic has exacerbated the sentiment that the European Union abandoned the Western Balkans to resolve the migration crisis on its own while the EU secured its borders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Allowing European and Serbian far-right extremists who commit crimes to move and operate within Serbia with impunity is dangerous and undermines institutions of democracy. If violent far-right actors continue to operate undisturbed, Serbia is at risk of more violent unrest, or even becoming a safe haven for far-right actors.

Mainstreaming exclusionary, extremist, and violent rhetoric through political and media outlets, normalize hate speech and incites more violence against migrants, refugees, and minorities, as well as political opponents and activists. More research on migration and far-right anti-immigrant organizing in the Western Balkans region is still needed. It is important to conduct deeper research to understand how far-right activity in this area affects or may impact migrants and local communities.

Understanding the narratives presented by far-right actors in Serbia, their appeal among local and international communities, and dissemination strategies are the keys to finding means to counter the influence and spread of extremist views and violent actions.

Given the rise of anti-migrant sentiments and far-right rhetoric in the region, moving forward, greater attention to the treatment and management of communications and misinformation around migration and the well being of the migrants and their hosts is needed, from researchers, and policymakers.

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