



National Minorities in BiH

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina works with government and civil society partners to improve the political, economic and social participation of the 17 recognized national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Law on the Protection of Rights of Members of National Minorities in 2003. The law states that BiH will protect the status, equality and rights of 17 national minorities present in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): Albanians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Italians, Jews, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Turks, and Ukrainians. The law was a landmark document for BiH's national minorities as it gave them the right to protect their cultural, religious, educational, social, economic and political freedoms, needs and identities.

The Mission subsequently advocated for and supported the adoption of the Laws on Protection of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and the establishment and development of National Minority Councils at the state and entity levels. Currently, the Mission works at all levels of government ranging from local community and municipality to entity and state level to improve the political, economic, and social participation of national minorities in BiH. Mission field staff work closely with national minority organizations and associations in community engagement and education initiatives as well as other activities to protect national minority rights. The Mission places a particular focus on the Roma – the largest and most marginalized national minority group in BiH.

Inclusion of National Minorities via Community Engagement

Within community engagement activities, the Mission works to increase the visibility and influence of national minorities and other marginalized groups; currently these groups are not organized and have very little influence on public affairs in their communities. The Mission's efforts focus on the development and capacity building of networks between organizations which enable marginalized groups to be properly represented and develop platforms to advocate for their needs. In addition to facilitating the development of these networks, the Mission works to build the capacities of national minority organizations to identify community needs and to develop their skills to lobby for necessary resources and services. As part of the Community Engagement programme, the Mission also works to improve Roma access to employment opportunities through targeted capacity building and co-ordination with employment institutes.

National Minorities and Education

With support from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, teaching materials (a student workbook and teacher manual) on the culture, heritage, origins and traditions of the national minorities in BiH were developed in 2008-2009 to increase teaching and learning about the richness of diversity within BiH. In 2010, the Mission launched its *Kaleidoscope* project to increase



young people's understanding of national minorities and to further establish "others" in the social life of mainstream society. Following the successful completion of the project, which involved hundreds of schools from across BiH, the Mission continues to encourage schools to actively teach about national minorities and to help those who belong to the 17 national minority groups to feel more included in their communities and proud of their heritage. Further, the Mission promotes and supports educational authorities in introducing national minority language(s) in schools.

The Mission's work on the national minorities in education dates back to 2004, when the *Action Plan on the Education Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in BiH*, supported and developed by the Mission, was signed by all Ministers of Education. In 2010, the *Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Roma Educational Needs* was finalized and adopted by the BiH Council of Ministers. This plan aims to provide equal access to quality education (at pre-school, primary, secondary and university level) to this marginalized group of children so that they can acquire the knowledge necessary for further integration into society.

Roma Focus

The Roma are the largest national minority group in BiH and are the most socially, economically and politically marginalized group in the country. In post-war BiH, the Roma face a series of difficulties exercising the full range of fundamental human rights guaranteed under the BiH

Constitution. Of particular concern are issues regarding property rights, access to social welfare, education and employment.

Recognizing the various issues hindering the inclusion of Roma, the Mission works to increase the Roma's access to governmental authorities and human rights institutions. BiH joined the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015" in September 2008 and the Mission has provided further targeted support and advice to the BiH Roma Advisory Board and the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. The aim is to ensure the full and effective participation of Roma in governmental policy bodies and structures, address problems in the areas of housing, health, employment and education, as well as combat discrimination and prejudice against Roma.

Eliminating Institutionalized Discrimination

The European Court of Human Rights in 2009 in the *Sejdić and Finci v Bosnia and Herzegovina* case determined that the BiH Constitution discriminated against national minorities by not allowing non Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs to assume certain governmental positions. The Mission has been a strong proponent of the implementation of the decision.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina assists BiH in meeting its OSCE commitments and in progressing towards its stated goal of Euro-Atlantic integration by strengthening security and stability through completion of peace-building within the Dayton framework and developing inclusive political discourse and democratically accountable institutions that respect diversity, promote consensus and respect the rule of law. The Mission takes a comprehensive and integrated approach through its field presence, reflecting an emphasis on developing cohesive communities and on the timely identification of obstacles to progress.