

Combating Gender Based Violence



In spite of progress made in gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discrimination based on gender and the violation of women's rights in both the public and private spheres all too often fails to get the attention it needs. Violence not only affects individual women: it endangers the wellbeing of entire families and society as a whole.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Mission) recognises that gender-based violence is an impediment to the security and safety of all citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). For this reason, the Mission invests substantial resources into monitoring responses to gender-based violence - a widespread and underreported phenomenon in BiH.

The role of the Mission

The 2018 OSCE-led Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women was conducted in seven OSCE participating States, interviewing more than 15,000 women, including over 2,300 women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The survey results for BiH were released in June 2019 indicating that 38% of BiH women have experienced

some form of violence since the age of 15. The most prevalent form is psychological violence carried out by an intimate partner (36% of women affected), closely followed by sexual harassment (28%).

Taking into account that only 5% of reported current partner violence, and only 3% of those exposed to sexual harassment, the Mission recognizes the need for systematic data collection, and is committed to ensuring the coordinated and sustainable data collection on all forms of gender-based violence in BiH. In 2015, together with the Gender Centre of the Federation of BiH, the Mission developed a database that pools information on domestic violence interventions by police,

social workers, safehouses and domestic violence SOS phone lines. The database aims to enable better responses to and protection of victims, and a more co-ordinated approach across BiH. The process also includes data collection as prescribed by entity-level legislation, including on the characteristics of the crime, details on any protective measures implemented, alongside other actions taken.

¹ Available at <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/413237?download=true>.

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova and Ukraine. The research was also conducted in Kosovo (All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.)

³ Available at <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/423470>.

The Mission's activities aimed at improving responses to domestic violence tackle three primary areas:

- Promoting the appropriate identification and prosecution of perpetrators of domestic violence within the criminal justice system.
- Advocating for adequate protection and assistance for survivors.
- Supporting the establishment of referral mechanisms that improve co-ordinated community responses in cases of domestic violence.

The Mission, together with partner institutions, invests substantial efforts in awareness-raising activities, for instance by marking the *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence* each year, and creating synergies between authorities and civil society in combating gender-based violence.

BiH is signatory to several international conventions and covenants including the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and *Council of Europe Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*.

The *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*⁴ and the *Istanbul Convention*⁵ helped to ensure the recognition of gender-based violence against women as a form of discrimination. According to these instruments:

- VaW takes several forms, including, but not limited to: domestic violence; sexual violence; harmful practices; trafficking in human beings, sexual and other types of exploitation, sexual harassment, and that perpetrated by the state.
- VaW affects women's private and public life.
- inequality between men and women is a root cause of violence against women and girls, so, discrimination and economic inequality, including lack of economic independence, can increase women's vulnerability to violence.

In accordance with the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE Ministerial Council adopted Decision No. 4/18 on *Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women* in December 2018 as an expression of the importance the OSCE places on this issue.

The 2018 OSCE-led Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women indicated that one in seven women (14%) had experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 by a partner or non-partner, with slapping indicated as the most frequent form of serious incident. However, 13% of those who survived physical violence indicated that most serious incident of previous partner violence involved forced sexual intercourse. Since the age of 15, 28% of women had experienced sexual harassment and 10% in the last 12 months. Stalking had affected one in twenty (5% - the same in both entities). Around three in ten survivors suffered from long-lasting psychological conditions while two thirds reported suffering other psychological consequences.

In only about one in twenty cases of current partner violence did the victim contact the police herself (BiH: 5% - FBiH: 10%, RS: 1%). This number increases to 33% when it comes to a previous partner and 21% to a non-partner.

Reluctance among victims to report indicates mistrust in public institutions, particularly in the police. This can also be linked to a lack of support from victims' immediate surroundings, as 25% of women tend to agree that domestic violence is a private matter and should be handled within the family.

Survivors of violence and those at risk need access to protection and basic services. Specialized support services for survivors of violence against women include safehouses, medical assistance, collection of forensic medical evidence in cases of rape and sexual abuse, psychological counselling, legal counselling, advocacy, and SOS telephone lines, among other things. There are currently eight safehouses (three in RS and five in FBiH) managed by NGOs and two SOS lines available for survivors of violence.

SOS Line for FBiH-1265
SOS Line for RS-1264

⁴ Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/violenceagainstwomen.aspx>.

⁵ Available at <https://www.coe.int/tr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>.

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