

Improving teaching and learning processes



Education plays a crucial role in the development of sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), as it contributes to shaping the views and attitudes of young people. Despite some changes introduced over the past two decades, the teaching process remains all too often based on outdated curricula and teaching materials. These issues combine with a heavy ethnic, religious and gender bias, meaning that schools often fail to equip students with the competencies they need for life in today's society. Current education practices hinder reconciliation and jeopardize long-term stability, manifested through a lack of development of competencies, such as critical thinking, problem solving, multiperspectivity, inclusivity and respect of diversity, innovation and collaboration among the young generations.

Over the years, the Mission has been committed to the development of inclusive quality

education, reflecting human rights norms and values, by advocating for and supporting

the improvement of policies and practices for primary and secondary education. To achieve these objectives, the Mission assists authorities in designing, planning, and leading education reform. Furthermore, the Mission supports authorities in monitoring the impact of changes and adjusting them in an evidence-based manner. This evidence could be found in objectively measured results and indicators obtained by continuous participation of BiH in international large-scale assessments, such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS.

Key areas of interest to the Mission include the development of curricula based on student learning outcomes

(SLOs), strengthening teacher competencies, and the enhancement of teaching materials and textbooks.

Curricula based on student learning outcomes

A path that would allow BiH to move forward from current realities would be the comprehensive implementation of the enhanced Common Core Curriculum based on Student Learning Outcomes¹ (CCC SLOs), which was developed by the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education.

¹ Available at <https://aposo.gov.ba/bs/zajednicka-jezgra-definisana-na-ishodima-ucenja-u-bih-2/>.

The CCC SLOs shifts the education paradigm away from outdated practices, such as memorization and reproduction of content, to the development of competencies, such as critical thinking and multi-perspectivity. Although the BiH Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education clearly stipulates the obligation of CCC implementation, the enhanced CCC SLOs have not yet been implemented anywhere in the country. Therefore, the Mission is advocating for and supporting the responsible authorities to carry out the transformation of their curricula in line with the CCC SLOs.

Teacher competencies for inclusive quality education

Bringing the improved curriculum to life in a classroom requires that teachers' competencies be further expanded. For one, teachers need to be equipped with

knowledge and capacity for implementing inclusive quality education, through improved teaching and learning processes. However, the current pre-service teacher education is not up to this task, while in-service education lacks organization and recognition of continuous professional development. Both of these shortcomings threaten the implementation of learning outcomes and the sustainability of inclusive practices. To address these shortcomings, the Mission collaborates with international and domestic partners to systemically introduce changes both in pre-service and in-service education and professional development of teachers.

Teaching materials and textbooks

Despite a number of changes over the years to teaching material and textbooks, current versions in use across BiH often

fail to uphold the values of a democratic society. Textbooks rarely foster critical thinking or the skills needed for life in today's rapidly-changing world. On the contrary, much material, especially for history teaching, is dominated by a divisive curricula, often composed of three ethnically coloured, exclusive and generally mutually opposing versions of history. This poses a considerable threat to reconciliation and social cohesion. That is why the main focus of Mission efforts is the development of history curricula based on student learning outcomes (SLOs). Such curricula would focus on learning and teaching beyond memorisation of historical content to the development of critical thinking skills and multi-perspectivity. This would contribute to mutual understanding and social healing. As a result of the Mission's tireless work in this area, the Guidelines for Writing and Evaluation of History Textbooks for Primary and

Secondary Schools in BiH², were developed and adopted, followed by a new set of moderately improved history textbooks³. Additionally, as a result of collaborative efforts with the Mission, the Council of Europe published its Manual for History Teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008) and the two organizations conducted seminars for textbook authors, history advisors and teachers. Another major step on this path was development and adoption of the Common Core Curriculum based on Student Learning Outcomes for the History Subject⁴, resulting from the Mission's project "History for the Future –Toward Reconciliation through Education". In spite of these steps forward, much work still remains. The Mission continues advocating and supporting education authorities and teachers across the country to improve history teaching, as well as closely monitoring the recent inclusion of the period of 1992-1995 into history teaching.

² Available at <http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/1xs8fVB0hz4nh78h77cNnw->.

³ See: Karge, Heike (2008), 20th Century History in Textbooks of Bosnia and Herzegovina: An Analysis of Books used for the Final Grades of Primary School. Sarajevo: OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, http://www.gei.de/fileadmin/gei.de/pdf/abteilungen/schulbuch_und_gesellschaft/Suedosteuropa/BiH_Schulbuchanalyse_Englisch.pdf

⁴ Available at <https://aposo.gov.ba/bs/zjnp-povijest/>.

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