



# Fostering Youth Participation

Through targeted projects implemented at the local level, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina strives to raise the level of young peoples' civic engagement and encourages them to take a more active role in community decision-making processes.

## Engagement at the Local Level

Within the *Local First Initiative*, the Mission places particular attention on providing mechanisms for youth to become more active in local communities (*mjesne zajednice*) and municipal affairs and to make demands on their elected officials.

To best represent the interests of young people and increase their ability to lobby for their needs, the Mission encourages the formation of youth organizations and youth councils, and builds their capacities via various trainings. Trainings focus on project cycle management, leadership and negotiation skills, lobbying and advocacy techniques, and other thematic topics designed to raise the competences of youth organizations and increase their ability to develop projects and access resources from municipal authorities.

The Mission also works with government bodies at the local, entity and state level to ensure that the appropriate legislation and regulations are in place to enable greater youth engagement in community affairs. At the local level, the Mission supports the development of local youth and volunteering policies.

## Youth Councils

Consisting mostly of local youth non-governmental organization (NGO) members, Youth Councils are umbrella organizations at the municipal level which can operate as direct partners to local authorities. Youth Councils are often involved in the development and implementation of local youth policies and advocate for and represent youth interests.

Although an important component of both the Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation of BiH (FBiH) legal frameworks, Youth Councils do not exist and operate in all BiH municipalities. Recognizing their potential role in encouraging and enabling greater youth participation, the Mission works extensively to establish and empower more Youth Councils.

Through presentations of the youth laws and various workshops with youth and municipal officials, the Mission aims to raise awareness of this new mechanism of youth participation. The Mission further facilitates their establishment by supporting networking between youth NGOs and contributes to the capacity building of Youth Council members through targeted trainings.

## Volunteerism

Recognizing the value of volunteerism in term of personal growth and community cohesion, the Mission actively promotes volunteerism and encourages young citizens to become more involved. The Mission assists this process by organizing workshops and presentations and by supporting the development of Local Volunteer Services (LVS).

In order to encourage volunteerism and protect those who participate, the Mission is also a strong advocate of the development of legislation which recognizes and clearly defines the status of volunteers and volunteer work. Volunteerism legislation was adopted in the RS (in 2008) and the Mission, in co-operation with Local Volunteer Services and other international organizations and NGOs, is advocating for the adoption of similar legislation in the FBiH and at the state level, as well as for greater recognition of volunteerism at the local level in the form of volunteering policies and *Volunteers of the Year Awards*.