

National Minorities in BiH

4 OUT OF 5

people in BiH view



discrimination
against Roma
as very widespread

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

The BiH Law on the Protection of Rights of Members of National Minorities was adopted in 2003 and it states that BiH will respect, protect and develop the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of 17 recognized national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). 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 laws on

Protection of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Republika Srpska (adopted in 2004) and the Federation of BiH (adopted in 2008) and the establishment of national minority councils at the state and entity level.

Furthermore, in 2010 BiH ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The State-level Council of National Minorities (the Council) is an advisory body to the BiH Parliamentary Assembly and is composed of one representative from each recognized national minority.

However, their capacity to engage in policymaking is limited. The Mission is actively working to enhance the capacities of the Council at BiH and entity levels through special trainings and by continuing to strongly advocate for amendments to the Criteria for selection of the Council, to ensure transparent and non-discriminatory selection processes.

The Mission supports the Council's joint initiatives at all levels, for instance in tackling gaps in legislation.

In co-operation with the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Law on National Minorities, the Mission is supporting awareness raising, advocacy and capacity building activities to strengthen the engagement of BiH's national minorities in policymaking.

Roma

The Mission places a particular focus on Roma – the largest and most marginalized national minority group in BiH. Roma in BiH face discrimination in numerous areas, including education, employment, access to social protection, health services, housing and property rights.

Efforts to improve the situation of Roma are a vital part of the OSCE's work, especially in South-East Europe. The OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area reaffirms our commitments and calls upon participating States to enhance their efforts to ensure that Roma and Sinti are able to participate fully in society.

With this in mind, the Mission advocated for the establishment of the Roma Advisory Board to serve as an advisory body to the BiH Council of Ministers. The BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, in close co-ordination with nine Roma representatives, agreed to establish such a board in 2002. Since then the Mission has collaborated with the Roma Advisory Board, supporting activities aimed at improving the inclusion of Roma in society.

Given the issues hindering the full inclusion of Roma in BiH

society, the Mission works to improve Roma access to authorities and human rights institutions. BiH joined the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015" in September 2008 and the Mission has provided further support and advice to the BiH Roma Advisory Board and the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. This aims to ensure the full participation of Roma in governmental policy bodies and structures, address problems in areas including housing, health, employment and education, and to combat discrimination and prejudice against Roma.

In spite of recent improvements, housing conditions for the Roma population are often inadequate, with many living in informal settlements lacking water or electricity. The Mission continues to support the authorities' efforts to fully implement the Roma Action Plan in the fields of health care, employment and housing.

The Mission also provides assistance to the respective authorities to develop Roma action plans at cantonal and municipal level. Crucially, the OSCE advocates that the perspective of Roma women and youth are wholly reflected in these strategic documents.

The Mission has also focused on enhancing the capacities of young Roma activists, particularly young Roma women, and has supported an initiative to establish a BiH Council of Roma Youth. To build on work ensuring the better integration of Roma in society, the Mission has provided specially tailored trainings for Roma civil society organizations. A key example of this is the Mission's support to the Roma Women network "Success", allowing the organization to raise awareness about the position of Roma women in BiH.

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