

# Environmental Protection



The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina addresses challenges in environmental protection by working with the authorities and civil society in a wide range of areas. The Mission's priorities in this field include improving public access to information and participation in decision-making affecting the environment, strengthening the capacities of the BiH Network of Aarhus Centres and other relevant CSOs, and training future lawyers on environmental law. The Mission also supports local-level efforts to directly involve citizens in protecting the environment.

High levels of air pollution, limited water management and waste management capacities, uncontrolled construction, and other environmental problems combine to make Bosnia and Herzegovina one of the worst

environmental performers in Europe and even the world.<sup>1</sup>

By causing disease and premature death, endangering livelihoods, and damaging relations between and within

communities, environmental problems compromise the living standards, health, and security of the people of BiH, posing a serious obstacle to sustainable development in the country. An inadequate focus on the environment at the highest levels of political decision-making, a lack of expertise on environmental law, and limited public awareness of the negative impacts of environmental degradation combine to hinder positive change in this area.

As a trusted partner of the authorities and civil society in BiH, and with longstanding engagement on activities in the environment and security nexus, the Mission works

to foster co-operation on environmental issues.

The Mission supports a broad range of actors in addressing the most pressing environmental issues. This is achieved by assisting the authorities in including the public in environmental policy and decision-making, strengthening the visibility, capacities and selected activities of the BiH Network of Aarhus Centres, providing a valuable opportunity for future lawyers to develop as environmental law experts, and directly supporting local-level efforts aimed at raising public awareness and ensuring a safe, clean environment.

<sup>1</sup> The Environmental Performance Index (EPI), which is produced jointly by Yale University and Columbia University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, ranks BiH 158 out of 180 countries.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) [Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](#) was adopted on 25 June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus (Århus) at the Fourth Ministerial Conference as part of the “Environment for Europe” process, entering into force on 30 October 2001. The Aarhus Convention establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment, providing for the right of everyone to receive environmental information that is held by public authorities, the right to participate in environmental decision-making and the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting the two aforementioned rights or environmental law in general. BiH ratified the Aarhus Convention in 2008.

## Support to Aarhus Centres

The BiH Aarhus Network, which comprises Aarhus Centres in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica, provides an important bridge between the general public, the authorities and the private sector on environmental matters, and is a source of independence and expertise in environmental action. The Mission supports the BiH Network of Aarhus Centres in order to strengthen their capacities and contribute to the promotion and implementation of the Aarhus Convention in BiH. Following the devastating floods of 2014, the Mission has also partnered with the Aarhus Centres in implementing a number of local-level Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities, which include support to revising municipal protection and rescue plans, organizing educational workshops and developing emergency information packages.

## Environmental Legal Clinics Programme

The lack of legal expertise on the environment - as reflected in the very low number of court cases on environmental matters - undermines both access to justice and environmental protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Whilst environmental law is occasionally offered as an elective subject, its omission from law faculty core curricula deprives students of the chance to learn about an important area of law and leaves citizens without adequate assistance in solving environmental problems. Therefore, the Mission, in co-operation with Aarhus Centre Sarajevo, initiated a semester-long Environmental Legal Clinics Programme for law students. Through a combination of expert-led lectures, workshops and a field trip, the programme aims to provide future lawyers with an essential opportunity to learn about environmental legislation and cases, including those relevant to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, whilst also further developing their research, case preparation and advocacy skills.

## Local level environmental action

Together with its governmental and non-governmental partners, the Mission co-organizes clean-up and tree planting campaigns, presentations and roundtable events on tackling illegal dumping and other environmental challenges. Such activities aim to increase public awareness and stimulate direct citizen action on the environment.

## Support to Aarhus Convention reporting process

The Mission provides support to the BiH Aarhus Convention National Focal Point (located within the Federation Ministry of Environment and Tourism) in ensuring that civil society and public voices are reflected in the country's Aarhus Convention National Implementation Reports. Mission assistance has included expert support to the drafting process as well as support to the organization of public consultation events during the 2011, 2014 and 2017 reporting cycles.

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OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Fra Anđela Zvizdovića 1, UNITIC Tower A  
71000 Sarajevo  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Office: +387 33 952 100  
Fax: +387 33 442 479  
[press.ba@osce.org](mailto:press.ba@osce.org)  
[www.osce.org/bih](http://www.osce.org/bih)