

# HATE CRIME REPORTING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Findings and recommendations  
from the 2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey<sup>1</sup>

## Securing justice for victims and offenders

Securing justice for victims and offenders begins with reporting crimes to the police or other authorities. This opens avenues for victims to receive support and protection where needed and for offenders to be held responsible for their actions. Yet, not all victims report hate crimes and other crimes to the police.

*Understanding why some people refrain from reporting crimes they endure is crucial for promoting hate crime reporting and achieving justice for victims.*

While such understanding has already been provided by crime victimisation surveys internationally, the [2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey](#) aimed to shed light on these issues in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *This fact sheet summarizes the survey findings related to the reporting of crimes to the police and explores reasons for underreporting, providing recommendations for criminal justice authorities and nongovernmental organizations informed by the survey findings.*

*The 2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey sampled 2,438 respondents aged 15 and older from 18 municipalities/cities with consistently high numbers of potential hate crimes recorded by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina hate crimes database. A nonprobability sampling design was used with quotas based on respondents' ethnoreligious identity, gender, and age.*

*This type of survey design is commonly used in market and opinion research as it is resource and cost efficient. Self-completion interviews were conducted via an online panel and direct recruitment by interviewers from July to October 2023. The non-probability sampling makes it impossible to estimate the likely accuracy of the survey findings since such estimates are based on statistical principles associated with probability, or random, sampling.*

*Nevertheless, given the level of accuracy often produced in practice by surveys of this type, it is possible to consider the survey results as strongly indicative of the experience of the general population in the selected municipalities/cities.*

"Hate crime" is defined by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as "criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. Hate crimes comprise two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation.

<sup>1</sup> [The 2023 Hate Crime Underreporting Survey for Bosnia and Herzegovina \(BiH\)](#) was carried out between July and October 2023, as the first survey that aimed to systematically capture the experience of potential hate crime victimization in BiH. The survey was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Cooperation Agreement with the OSCE regarding 2022-2024 extra-budgetary contributions and commissioned by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights provided support in reviewing the survey questionnaire.

A hate crime has taken place when a perpetrator has intentionally targeted an individual or property because of one or more identity traits or expressed hostility towards these identity traits during the crime.”<sup>2</sup> This definition aligns with hate crime definitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s criminal laws.

The use in this fact sheet of the terms ‘potential crimes’ and ‘potential hate crimes’ recognizes that from the survey data alone it is not possible to legally verify whether incidents noted by respondents qualify as crimes under criminal codes in BiH. Verification is ultimately provided by the courts. This limitation also applies to crime victimization surveys internationally. However, such surveys have long been used in some countries, such as Great Britain, Sweden, and the United States, to provide a more realistic account of crime victimization than captured by police recorded crime data.

## Key findings

### Potential crimes and hate crimes are more likely to go unreported than reported to the police.

The survey asked victims of potential crimes and hate crimes if they or anybody else reported it to the police. *Only a minority of victims reported incidents to the police:* just 27 per cent of potential hate crimes, and 22 per cent of other potential crimes were reported. While there appears to be a small difference in reporting rates between potential hate crimes and other potential crimes, it would not be considered to be a reliable population estimate if determined by a probability sample.

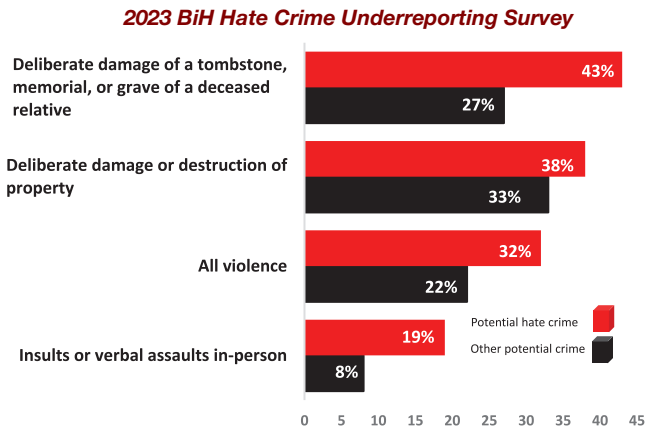
### For each crime category, hate crimes were more likely to be reported to the police compared to other crimes.

The small differences in reporting rates between potential hate crimes and other potential crimes, would not be considered to be reliable population estimates if determined by probability sampling - apart from the category of insults or verbal assaults in person. However, the differences would be considered as reliable estimates if determined by a probability sample of a larger size.

### Reporting rates vary depending on crime type.

The highest rate of reporting by victims of potential crimes and hate crimes in the survey was for deliberate damage of a tombstone, grave, or memorial for a deceased relative, followed closely by damage or destruction of property. *Fewer than one-third of all violent incidents were reported to the police.* Insults delivered in person had the lowest reporting rate.

### Percentages of victims who reported potential crimes and hate crimes to the police

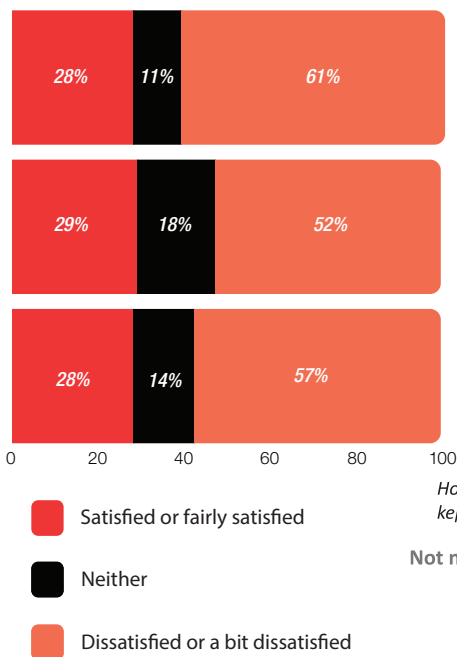


### The police response to reported crimes tended to leave victims dissatisfied rather than satisfied.

Potential crime victims expressed more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with how the police handled their cases. Victims of potential hate crimes were slightly more dissatisfied than victims of other potential crimes. While this difference would not be considered to be a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling, it would be viewed as reliable if estimated by a probability sample of a larger size.

<sup>2</sup> "What is hate crime?" <https://hatecrime.osce.org/>

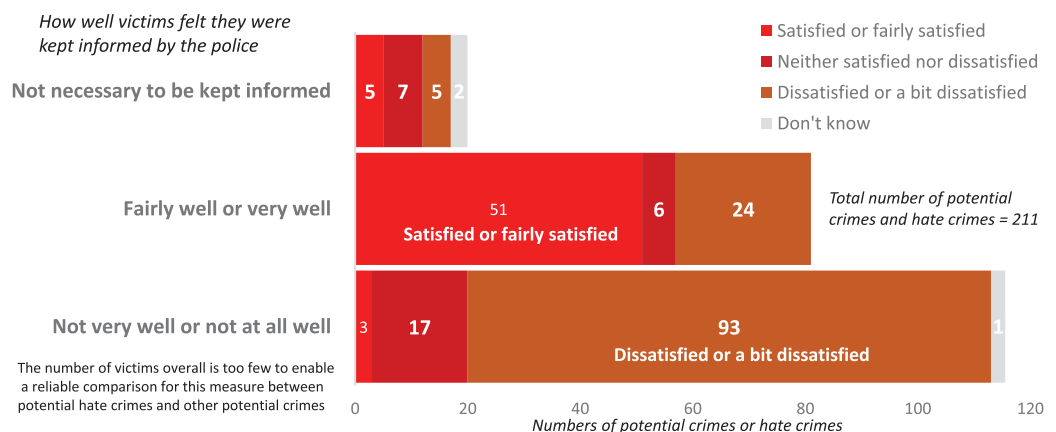
## Victim satisfaction with how police dealt with the matter following reporting of potential crimes and hate crimes



## Victim satisfaction after reporting to the police is clearly associated with how well victims are kept informed.

Overall, in over half (53 per cent) of the potential crimes reported to the police, *victims indicated they were either not at all informed or poorly informed about the progress of their case*. Those who felt poorly informed reported the lowest levels of satisfaction.

## Association between satisfaction with the police and how well victims felt they were kept informed about the progress of their case



## Major barriers to reporting are the beliefs that the police would either be unable to take action, or would not be interested.

When survey respondents who were victims of potential crimes or hate crimes that were not reported to the police were asked about their reasons for not reporting, multiple-choice responses were possible. *The primary reasons cited by both victims of potential hate crimes and victims of other potential crimes included a lack of confidence in the police's ability to intervene and a perception that the police would not be concerned or interested*. A notably larger proportion of victims of potential hate crimes expressed the view that the police would be bothered or interested compared to victims of other crimes - and this is the only difference that would be considered to be a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling.

## Reasons why potential crimes and hate crimes were not reported to the police



## Recommendations for encouraging hate crime reporting

In some cases, crime victims may realistically assume that the police will not be able to take action if the crime is reported due to a lack of trace evidence, information about the perpetrators, or witnesses. Nevertheless, *to encourage victims who wish to report crimes*, the survey evidence strongly suggests that police and other criminal justice authorities need to convey a clear message that they *take reported potential crimes seriously*, including hate crimes. This can be achieved by:

- *Engaging specially trained police officers and prosecutors in community outreach to build relationships and instill confidence that reported hate crimes will be taken seriously and victims supported;*
- *Publicizing successful prosecutions to encourage other victims to come forward, demonstrating that reporting hate crimes can lead to justice for the perpetrators.*

## The reporting of hate crimes might also be encouraged by:

- *Setting-up freephone helplines and online services for reporting hate crimes;*
- *Providing in-person and online advice and support services for hate crime victims;*
- *Facilitating third-party reporting where victims can contact community organizations that can report on their behalf to criminal justice authorities;*
- *Providing assistance for community organizations supporting hate crime victims;*
- *Conducting public relations and media campaigns to raise awareness about available assistance and support for hate crime victims, and to encourage reporting.*

*Once a hate crime is reported, it is the responsibility of the police, prosecution authorities, and courts to thoroughly investigate, efficiently prosecute and appropriately adjudicate crimes, as well as to keep victims informed about the progress of their case.* Criminal justice authorities should continually evaluate and review their processes to ensure that victims are consulted and kept informed, given the significant impact on victim satisfaction highlighted by the survey.

**Going further** – some key reading on the reporting of hate crime with recommendations for policy and practice:

European Commission, EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance (2021), *Key guiding principles on encouraging reporting of hate crime*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021), *Encouraging hate crime reporting – The role of law enforcement and other authorities*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.