

Fostering Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory Education



Education, is a fundamental human right and it must be guaranteed without discrimination on any grounds. However, rather than promoting mutual understanding and a respect for diversity, the education policies and practices in BiH still reflect politically-driven ethno-national divisions nearly thirty years following the end of conflict. This means that many children in BiH still face discriminatory practices and segregation in education today. It is a direct challenge to their right to education. In this regard, one of the key objectives of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Mission) is to strengthen and support the efforts of BiH education authorities to ensure non-discriminatory inclusive quality education for all children. Persistent discriminatory practices and segregated education risk deepening divisions, weakening social cohesion and public confidence, and undermining long-term stability in BiH. Strengthening inclusive policies, curricula, and teaching is essential to ensure all children can fully enjoy their right to education and contribute to a cohesive, peaceful society.

The Mission has been a firm partner to education authorities in the fight for better education across BiH. Our efforts are bolstered by the unique cross-country field presences which allow for tailored approaches and solutions.

Working with a wide range of education stakeholders (ministries of education, pedagogical institutes, schools' directors, teachers, education inspectors, students and parents), the Mission advocates for, and supports, their efforts toward the development of non-discriminatory policies

and practices and inclusive learning environments. The Mission's efforts also include supporting the adoption of legislation that would allow the full enjoyment of the right to education, aligned with domestic and international legal norms. For instance, the Mission supported authorities to develop the Guidelines for Recognising Discrimination in the Field of Education (the Guidelines) in BiH and related internal acts and procedures.

The most prominent and challenging topics in the education sector are the “two schools under one roof” phenomenon; the equality of languages in education; religious education; “alternative subjects,” as well as the fulfilment of educational needs of Roma children.

In 2018 the Mission issued a report [Two Schools under One Roof: The Most Visible Example of Discrimination in Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), identifying the main practices and challenges, and providing concrete recommendations that would put an end to discriminatory practices.

The Mission also advocates for the equal respect for the languages of the three constituent peoples in the education framework across the country. Each constituent people have the right to use and name their own language.¹ In parallel, constituent peoples have no right, under the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), to impose an entire teaching

process in only one of the three official languages. The United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights stated that it is a misinterpretation of cultural rights of constituent peoples to overemphasize linguistic differences in order to enforce segregation of students based on ethno-national affiliation.²

With respect to religious education, the Mission’s advocacy underscores that the parents’ rights to decide on the religious education of their children be respected. This should be in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. This is to be applied to religious education, as well as the alternative subject for students opting out of the former. Recognizing and acting constructively vis-à-vis the potential of religious education as a driver for interreligious understanding is a vital element for education authorities in their development of inclusive teaching policies and practices.

The Mission’s analyses on religious education teaching showed that, in practice, many schools do not inform parents that religious education classes are optional. However, once parents opt for this subject, they are not able to opt out until the completion of primary or secondary education.

The Mission also continues to advocate for the establishment of effective systemic mechanisms to ensure the fulfilment of the educational needs of Roma children.

These include the development, implementation, assessment, and adjustment of action plans at all levels of authority, aligned with the BiH Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma (2021- 2025). In line with the Action Plan, the Mission also advocates for the introduction of an optional school subject on Romani language with elements of culture and history.

In closing, while curricula and textbooks have a direct impact on what students learn in the classrooms, school names, symbols and manifestations also feed into the existing divisive education policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They can contribute to the creation of school environments that promote ethnic exclusivity rather than the broader affiliation to a school and community. This can create the potential for non-majority students to feel alienated or offended. In this regard, the Mission calls on education authorities to revisit their respective by-laws that govern school names, symbols and manifestations and to work on establishing school environments that are appropriate and welcoming for all students, as outlined in the Mission’s 2021 report [School names, symbols and manifestations at primary and secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A status update with recommendations | OSCE](#)

¹ Constitutional Court of BiH, U 7/15, May 2016

² A/HRC/25/49/Add.1, United Nations General Assembly: UN Human Rights Council, 3 March 2014

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