

History Teaching Materials on 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina



EARLY STEPS ON IMPROVING THE HISTORY TEACHING MATERIALS

As a part of a larger effort to foster sustainable return and reconciliation in the country, in 1998, the international community in BiH – with agreement of education authorities – launched the textbook reform process for the national group of subjects¹. In 2000, with the same objective in mind, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly recommended a moratorium on teaching about the most recent conflict “to enable historians from all communities [...] to develop a common approach”. Efforts to improve history subject teaching materials resulted in the development and adoption in 2006 of the **Guidelines for Textbook Writing and Evaluation of History Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools in BiH (the Guidelines)**. Although subsequently published textbooks showed some improvements, history teaching in BiH continued in many areas to be exploited for the promotion of one-sided narratives, which emphasized differences and deepened divisions in society.

Shifting the focus on students’ skills instead of content

In 2015, the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary, and Secondary Education developed and adopted the Common Core Curriculum for History Subject based on Student Learning Outcomes (CCC SLOs), with support of the OSCE Mission to BiH and the U.S. Embassy. This was a positive step towards modernizing curricula and improving the quality of history education, with a focus on students’ skills, such as critical thinking, historical empathy,

multiperspectivity, and the ability to analyse sources and evidence

Current situation

Instead of greater focus being placed on the implementation of the standards set by the Guidelines and the CCC SLOs, education authorities continue in many areas to focus on strengthening their own ideologies and advancing wider political objectives.

¹ In accordance with the 2002 Interim Agreement on Accommodation of specific needs and rights of returnee children – language and literature, history, geography – in early grades of primary school ‘nature and society – and religious instruction.

This is evident in materials introduced in recent years for the subject of history related to the highly sensitive period of 1992-1995. This content is contrary to the aforementioned Council of Europe recommendation, which was mainly respected until 2017. This trend is reflected in some administrative units in new legislative provisions, curricula amendments, and additions to textbooks and teaching materials. This concerning development poses a threat to achievements related to history subject teaching and learning, and perpetuates societal divisions in BiH. The continued use of ethnocentric history teaching materials risks deepening divisions, weakening social cohesion and public confidence in education, and undermining long-term peace and reconciliation. Strengthening curricula and multiperspectivity is essential to equip students to engage critically with the past and foster an inclusive society.

In 2023, the Mission published an [external analysis](#) written by an independent expert regarding history subject textbooks and other learning and teaching materials concerning the period of 1992-1995.

Key findings

There is a need for a fundamental change in the approach to teaching the subject of History in BiH, especially in relation to the period 1992-1995, i.e. away from the currently dominant narrative of monumental history to the narrative of critical history.

o The analysed textbooks and teaching materials are **ethnocentric and develop three mutually exclusive narratives**.

o The analysed textbooks and teaching materials dealing with the 1992-1995 period in BiH **contribute to the politicization and instrumentalization of the past** rather than to mutual understanding and reconciliation.

o All recount the conflict-ridden 1990s almost exclusively as the years of one's 'own' victimhood, **promote empathy only toward one's 'own' people, and portray the 'other' side almost exclusively as perpetrators**.

o The implementation of **multiperspectivity** and related learning outcomes **is not a predominant approach** in any of the analysed textbooks and teaching materials.

o Where present, **multiperspectivity and critical thinking are not designed to challenge the actions of members of one's 'own' people**.

Key recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Develop flexible curricula

...eliminate the current overload of content and instead focus on achieving student learning outcomes specific to history. ... equip young people with a foundation of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to engage in democratic discourse

beyond the confines of the history classroom and school.

Recommendation 2:

Acknowledge multiple identities and shared experiences and foster historical empathy toward the 'other'

Recommendation 3:

Acknowledge multiple identities and deal with crimes committed by members of one's 'own' people against members of other peoples

Recommendation 4:

Acknowledge competing narratives

Develop in students the competence to critically examine conflicting narratives and recognize their political instrumentalization in the past and present in order to learn how (hi)stories are constructed and to recognize that these constructs can also exist to serve political purposes in the present.

Recommendation 5:

Strengthen teachers' competences

For more information, scan the QR code.



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