

Enhancing Youth Participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina



The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) places great significance on working for youth and with youth, recognizing young as key partners for positive change, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

The work with and for youth is an important part of the Mission's portfolios, which is ensured through a formal incorporation of a youth portfolio into its structure. The Gender and Youth Unit, along with the informal network of youth focal points and other colleagues are there to ensure that youth perspectives are integrated in all aspects of work of the Mission.

The Mission appreciates the unique way young people promote a positive outlook through advancing mutual understanding, reconciliation and regional co-operation, and their desire to protect the norms underpinning democratic governance. Nonetheless, rising levels of youth disengagement from political and public life and a growing sense of marginalization pose a major challenge. By increasing the democratic political culture of youth and their capacity

for a constructive dialogue, the Mission aims to increase the sustainability of their civic engagement and political participation.

Political Participation

The Mission developed and piloted a comprehensive training programme for youth forums of parliamentary political parties at number of locations across Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The programme aims to enhance the competencies and skills of young politicians, enabling them to actively contribute to the development of local and youth policies, particularly in the areas of human rights, gender equality and anti-discrimination.

The Mission continues to engage with the trainees through networking and collaboration on various community policy initiatives and plans to expand the programme to include new trainees. In partnership with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and in co-operation with the eleven largest and most influential political parties in BiH, the Mission has been developing a unique OSCE methodology for conducting youth participation audits within political parties. These audits, currently tested in BiH, aim to produce concrete recommendations to improve the status and influence of young people within party structures.

Capacity Building

Through its project activities, the Mission has delivered different types of capacity building activities for university and secondary school students across BiH. These include training sessions and workshops on freedom of religion or belief, trafficking in human beings, war crimes and hate crimes, non-violent communication and dialogue facilitation, anti-corruption, recognizing and reporting corrupt practices. In addition, the Mission has established the Annual Media Law School, which has become a permanent part of the Sarajevo University programme. Lastly, the Mission supports security summer school, State Moot Court Competition for law students and other educational activities for youth.

Youth and Security

Youth perspectives are well integrated in the Mission's project on the development, implementation and harmonization of security-related documents, programmes and legislation, contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth, Peace and Security. In its activities, the Mission focuses on the involvement of youth in security reforms and their participation in strengthening BiH's cybersecurity capacities.

Through its regular contacts with relevant partners, the Mission advocates for further involvement of the young professionals with competent state and entity

agencies. It also organizes the annual OSCE Cybersecurity Awareness Month followed by an ICT Fair, in which youth have a chance to engage in cybersecurity affairs.

All these activities and efforts also help monitor the country's implementation of UNSCR 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security Agenda), enabling the Mission to identify areas for further engagement with local authorities.

Youth and Environment

Through the regular Environmental Legal Clinics Programme for university law students, the Mission is helping to build the next generation of environmental lawyers. The programme has already encouraged several young people to pursue careers in the environmental sector. The Mission is currently exploring options to expand this programme to all public law faculties across the country. A concrete step in this direction is the initiation of dialogue with the Faculty of Law at the University of Sarajevo on establishing a postgraduate program in environmental law. This initiative aims to systematically foster the development of new generations of environmental experts.

In parallel, the Mission supports youth-led environmental initiatives (clean-up and recycling campaigns) to raise environmental awareness among young people and encourage their active engagement in environmental protection efforts.

Youth and Trust Building

The Mission has continuously supported various initiatives for youth engagement in cross-community dialog and trust-building, usually, by directly engaging young people in interreligious dialogue, community cohesion, inter-ethnic dialogue and joint activities on promotion of cultural activities across inter-entity boundary line.

Local Context – Youth Policies and Youth Structure

The Mission collaborates with all level of government in the country and advocate for adoption of necessary policies and other strategic documents as well as mainstreaming of youth issues in general developmental policies, which would improve the position of young people. Owing to Mission's efforts, some municipalities and cantons managed to adopt policies and strategies that either directly or indirectly concern the young population.

Apart from the governmental instances, our major partners in the field are number of proactive youth NGOs and municipal youth councils. The latter are often involved in the development and implementation of local youth policies and represent interests of young people at the local level. Although an important component of both entities' legal frameworks, youth councils do not exist or operate in all municipalities of BiH. Recognizing their potential, the Mission works to establish and empower youth councils across the country.

At the higher level, BiH does not have a nationwide youth council, but rather three youth councils: one per entity and one for Brčko District BiH, each established under its own youth law. The councils operate primarily within their respective jurisdictions, representing the interests of young people through legally established institutional frameworks. Mutual co-operation between the three youth councils is a critical element in promoting inclusive youth participation across the country.

Despite BiH's complex and decentralized political structure, the youth councils have been actively building co-operation, strengthening co-ordination and integration into broader BiH and regional youth discourse. They are increasingly present in advocacy spaces, institutional and capacity-building forums, and policy and strategy development across education, peacebuilding, and civic participation.

For more information, scan the QR code.



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