

HATE CRIMES AGAINST ROMA PEOPLE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the 2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey¹



Roma communities constitute Europe's most marginalized ethnic group, and one of the most vulnerable to human rights violations.² Roma people face widespread and pervasive discrimination, harassment, hate speech, violence and hate crime. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Roma people constitute one of the most marginalized minorities, experiencing relative socio-economic deprivation and barriers to integration.³ Yet to date, there has been little publicly available systematic evidence about anti-Roma victimization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The *2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey* therefore sought to uniquely explore the potential problem by attempting to recruit within its sample of the general population a sufficient sub-sample of Roma respondents to adequately investigate their experience. The key findings are presented in this fact sheet, with recommendations for criminal justice authorities informed by the survey findings.

"Hate crime" is defined by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)⁴ 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. 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." This definition aligns with hate crime definitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina's criminal laws.

The 2023 BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey sampled 2,438 respondents (which included 189 Roma 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.

¹ The [2023 Hate Crime Underreporting Survey for Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) 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.

² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, [Roma in 10 European Countries – Main Results](#), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023.

³ ECRI Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (fifth monitoring cycle) (2017), para. 68, pages 25-26: [ECRI_report_FR \(coe.int\)](#)

⁴ 'What is hate crime?' <https://hatecrime.osce.org/>

Key findings

Experience of potential crimes and hate crimes

- **Almost one quarter (24 per cent) of the Roma respondents had experienced at least one of the potential crimes asked about in the survey (excluding insults) on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months, compared with just under one fifth (18 per cent) of non-Roma respondents.** (However, the difference would not be considered a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling).
- **When in-person or online insults are included, over one third (35 per cent) of the Roma respondents had experienced at least one of the potential crimes and incidents asked about in the survey on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months, compared with just over one quarter (26 per cent) of non-Roma respondents.** (This difference would be considered a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling).
- **Gender has some mediation effect on the victimization rates as males were more likely than females to experience potential crime victimization. But when taking gender into account, Roma respondents were still more likely than non-Roma respondents to experience potential crime victimization in the previous 12 months.**

The gender profile of the Roma and non-Roma survey respondents differs as males are proportionately greater among the Roma sample compared with the non-Roma sample. When examining the potential crime victimization rates by gender (including in-person and online insults), however, the victimization rates barely change as 36 per cent of male Roma respondents compared with 25 per cent of non-Roma males experienced a potential crime in the previous 12 months. A small narrowing of the difference in victimization rates for females (33 per cent of Roma females compared with 27 per cent of non-Roma females) would not be considered a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling.

- **Younger respondents were more likely to experience potential crime victimization. When taking age into account, however, Roma respondents were still more likely than non-Roma respondents to experience potential victimization in the previous 12 months.**

The age profile of the Roma and non-Roma survey respondents differs as younger respondents are proportionately greater among the Roma sample compared with the non-Roma sample. When considering age for female and male respondents combined, 38 per cent of under 45-year-old Roma respondents as a group compared with 29 per cent of non-Roma respondents experienced a potential crime (including in-person and online insults) in the previous 12 months. For over 45-year-olds, an apparent difference in victimization rates between Roma (26 per cent) and non-Roma respondents (22 per cent) would not be considered a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling.

- **When considering potential hate crime victimization, Roma respondents were more likely than non-Roma respondents to perceive racial or religious bias motivation behind potential crimes.**

Fifteen per cent of Roma respondents, compared with 9 per cent of non-Roma respondents perceived ethnoreligious bias motivation behind at least one potential crime or incident (including in-person and online insults) they experienced in the previous 12 months. The differential widens for males as nearly twice the proportion of Roma males compared with non-Roma males (16 per cent compared with 8 per cent) perceived ethnoreligious bias motivation.

The 189 Roma respondents included in the survey were drawn from 10 of the 18 targeted municipalities. This number of respondents was fewer than hoped for, but sufficient for an indicative analysis of their experience of potential crime victimization.⁵ Most were recruited by snowball sampling method and interviewed face-to-face. In two of the municipalities/cities only one Roma respondent was recruited, only two respondents in another, and just 12 Roma respondents in a fourth municipality/city. Due to the very large imbalance in these four municipalities between the relative numbers of Roma and other respondents for any comparisons to be drawn, they were excluded from the analysis. The remaining sample of Roma respondents used for the analysis presented in this fact sheet amounted to 173 persons drawn from six municipalities/cities: Bihać, Bijeljina, Brčko, Kakanj, Sarajevo Centre, and Visoko. Roma respondents accounted for at least 10 per cent of all the survey respondents in each municipality/city. Where comparisons are made between Roma and other respondents, the comparisons are confined to these six municipalities/cities.

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 BiH Criminal Codes. 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.

⁵ Several Roma community representatives consulted about the survey indicated a pronounced reticence among the BiH Roma communities to participate in the survey due to a view that while much research has been conducted with them, they have not seen any subsequent benefits. This was a particular challenge when this view was held by community leaders in areas where their cooperation was needed to effectively undertake the survey. Therefore, as well as seeking to secure the cooperation of community leaders, some interviewers were directly employed from the Roma population in the municipalities/cities selected for the survey along with other interviewers with significant experience working with Roma communities.

Crime victimization by crime type

It is also instructive to compare the victimization experience of Roma and non-Roma respondents for the different types of crime asked about in the survey.

- **Roma respondents were almost twice as likely to experience in-person insults in the previous 12 months compared with other respondents, and over twice as likely to believe that they were insulted partly or completely because of their ethnic or religious background.**
- **The pattern of victimization is almost the same for violent crimes. Roma respondents were over twice as likely to experience violent crime in the previous 12 months and over twice as likely to believe that the crimes occurred partly or completely because of their ethnic or religious background.**

The small observed differences for the other crime types asked about in the survey would not be considered reliable population estimates if determined by probability sampling.

Reporting potential crimes to the police

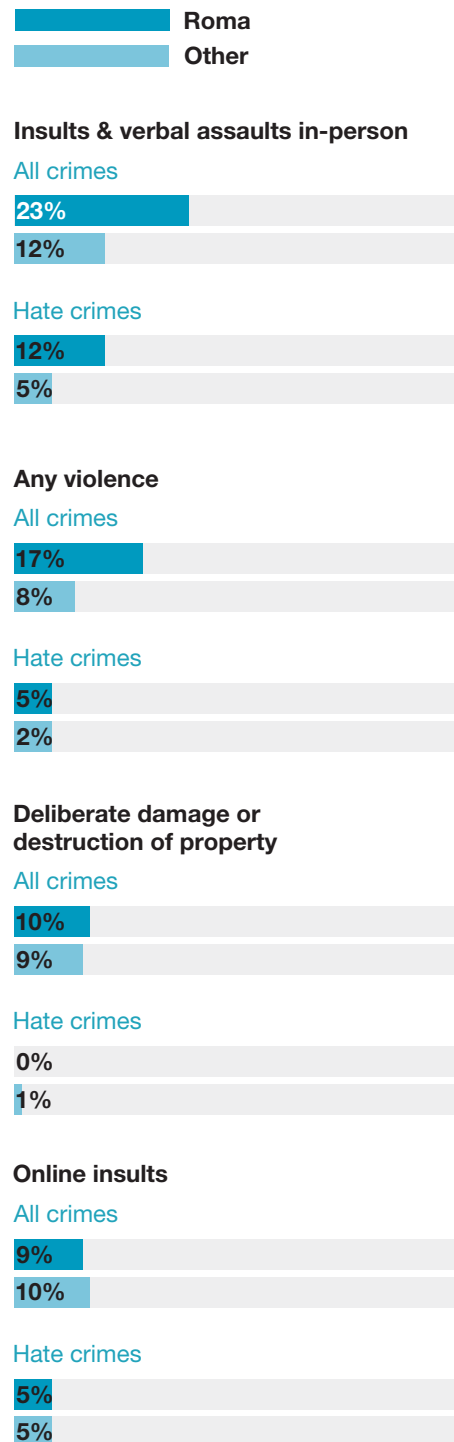
In total, 109 separate incidents of crime were experienced on at least one occasion by the Roma respondents, and 237 incidents experienced by non-Roma respondents. Only a minority who experienced potential crimes indicated that they or somebody else made a complaint to the police about their experience.

- **Only 23 per cent of all potential incidents of crime experienced by Roma respondents were reported to the police compared with 31 per cent for the non-Roma respondents.**

However, this finding must rest as indicative only, as the evident difference in reporting rates would not be considered a reliable population estimate if determined by probability sampling, although it would be confirmed with a larger sample size. The numbers are also too few to present a reliable comparison of reporting rates by type of crime.

- **Approximately one quarter of potential hate crimes experienced by Roma and non-Roma respondents were reported to the police.** However, these would not be considered reliable population estimates if determined by probability sampling due to the small numbers of respondents.

Percentages of Roma and other respondents who experienced potential ethnoreligious hate crimes in the last 12 months by crime type



Number of survey respondents:
Roma = 173, Other = 697

Recommendations

Some caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the findings from the 2023 *BiH Hate Crime Underreporting Survey* presented in this fact sheet. The Roma respondents included in the survey represent only a partial selection of Roma communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, the survey findings provide a step forward in understanding the potential crime victimization experience of Roma persons in BiH. The findings underline a need for the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish, in consultation with Roma communities, a dedicated criminal justice action plan. It will send a clear signal that anti-Roma hate crimes, and other crimes against the Roma, are taken seriously.

The action plan should include provisions for:

- Educating young people, local government officials, criminal justice professionals, the media, and the wider public about prejudices that contribute to anti-Roma hate crimes.
- An advisory group on anti-Roma hate crime and community safety, with ongoing collaborative partnership of members from Roma communities and criminal justice authorities.
- Specially trained police officers and prosecutors for community outreach to build relationships with Roma communities and instil confidence that reported hate crimes will be taken seriously and victims supported.
- Dedicated free telephone helplines and online services for Roma communities for the reporting of hate crimes.
- Third-party reporting whereby victims can contact Roma community organizations that can report on their behalf to criminal justice authorities.
- A harmonised system of data recording for all anti-Roma incidents and crimes, which include a record of the anti-Roma bias indicators, for police, prosecutorial, and judicial institutions.
- Regular training and guidance for police officers and other criminal justice professionals on the sensitive and respectful treatment of Roma victims of hate crime.
- Dedicated in-person and online advice and support services for hate crime victims from Roma communities.
- Professional quality standards for the delivery of hate crime victim support services specifically for Roma communities.
- Training of professionals for hate crime victim support specifically for Roma persons.
- Assistance for Roma community organizations supporting hate crime victims.
- Public relations and media campaigns to raise awareness about available assistance and support for victims of anti-Roma hate crime. To encourage reporting, this can include publicizing successful prosecutions of anti-Roma hate crime to encourage other victims to come forward, demonstrating that reporting hate crimes can lead to justice for the perpetrators.

Periodic reviews of the implementation of the action plan should be conducted in formal partnership with representatives and members of the Roma communities.

Going further—some key reading on anti-Roma hate crime with recommendations for policy and practice:

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (2023) [Understanding Anti-Roma Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Roma and Sinti Communities. A Practical Guide](#). Warsaw: OSCE ODIHR.



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