

Economic and Social Rights



Working hand-in-hand with government and civil society, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) strives to protect, promote and advance the economic, social, cultural and political rights of everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), with particular attention given to vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Modern, inclusive and equitable societies rest on the realization of economic, social, cultural and political rights, including the rights to social assistance and housing, effective social protection, as well as guaranties for adequate living standard. In the Helsinki Final Act, the participating States

recognized the close link between social well-being and peace and security in Europe. Also, several OSCE Ministerial Council decisions reinforce the OSCE commitments to labour rights, economic stability and sustainable development.

In BiH, where, according to United Nations Development Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNDP) almost 6.5 per cent of the population experiences at least one form of poverty, it becomes even more critical to protect these rights. The daily reality of most citizens in the country is marked by socio-economic difficulties – a high unemployment rate that particularly affects groups such as persons with disabilities, women, women in rural areas, young people, and others, weak labor protection, limited access to retraining or additional education, and

limited access to healthcare. Therefore, the Mission focuses on identifying good practices and creating optimal conditions for the full and meaningful enjoyment of these rights with the outcome to reduce social inequalities and rebuild public trust in the institutions. Namely, the Mission works towards the progressive fulfilment of international standards related to economic and social rights, by, inter alia;

- Promoting and incorporation of a human rights perspective into economic and social development;

- Assisting authorities in identifying and addressing human rights concerns and implementing their respective mandates in a human-rights-compliant manner;
- Enhancing the work of civil society organizations, coordination with international agencies and external donors engaged in economic and social development, from a rights-based perspective;
- Empowering individuals to defend their rights;
- Advocating for reform of the social protection sector, particularly in identifying gaps between the status and the real needs of the most vulnerable;
- Supporting the development of the capacities of social welfare institutions and of a social housing framework at all levels of government; and
- Monitoring and providing technical support to the drafting and reform of relevant legislative frameworks.

Although significant efforts are being made at all levels to promote economic and social development, there is no systematic monitoring or measurable indicators to determine whether economic and social development is in line with the respect for human rights. Given its unique field

presence and experience in dealing with citizens and institutions throughout the country, the Mission is well placed to address the human rights aspects of economic and social development and plays a significant monitoring, co-ordinating and intervention role.

Social Protection

Social protection refers to policies and programmes aimed at preventing poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, targeting vulnerable groups. It includes cash support, non-contributory schemes, benefits such as social assistance, and access to the labour market.

According to statistical data from the [BiH Agency for Statistics](#) (2024), nearly 22 per cent of the population lives at or below the poverty line. As noted in the [2025 EU Country Report for BiH](#), there are no countrywide strategies on poverty reduction, social protection or inclusion, nor is there a State-level system to monitor related policies and measures. To address these gaps, the Mission works to bolster the ability of domestic institutions to provide social protection throughout the country following a needs-based, rather than a status-based, approach.

With specific attention placed on social welfare centres, Mission activities aim to increase the capacity of local authorities to respond efficiently and equitably to requests for the exercise of basic social protection rights. The Mission also works closely with the BiH Union of Social Workers and Social Work Professionals, as well as cantonal and regional associations of social work, to increase capacity and responsiveness of the social protection system and empower social work professionals as an integral part of governmental consultation processes in developing social policy and advancing social work.

Social Housing

Despite success stories related to the post-war property restitution, severe housing issues remain, with a significant proportion of the population requiring public housing assistance. Unfortunately, such assistance is often not available to those who need it most, for instance refugees, displaced persons, single parent families, elderly individuals, women, children, young couples, persons with disabilities and Roma.

Although a number of housing units were built after the war, these facilities were allocated to certain groups of persons, such as families of fallen or

demobilized soldiers. As this allocation of housing units was made in the absence of a proper legal framework and criteria, many vulnerable categories could not access housing assistance. Without an adequate legal mechanism to regulate eligibility criteria, vulnerable individuals and families often find themselves without housing and in need of urgent assistance from municipal authorities.

In light of this, the Mission advocates for the development of a comprehensive social housing legal framework, fully aligned with international human rights standards, including supporting all levels of government to develop social housing laws and policies, action plans and municipal strategies. Positive results have already been made in Brčko District of BiH, Central-Bosnia and Una-Sana cantons as well as in Republika Srpska. Across the country, the Mission's experienced field office teams promote local social housing projects, thereby advocating for non-discriminatory and transparent procedures for the allocation of social housing units to the most vulnerable categories in society.

For more information, scan the QR code.



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