

Enjoyment of Fundamental Freedoms



Guided by OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, which underscores respect for human rights, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) works to promote and protect essential fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of assembly and association; freedom of expression and media; and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The Mission recognizes the protection of fundamental freedoms as critical to functional democratic societies. With this in mind, the Mission supports Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in improving and harmonizing laws and practices related to these freedoms, in line with international human rights

standards and relevant OSCE commitments.

This also includes the Mission's support in combating efforts to interfere with the enjoyment of these freedoms. Critical to this work is the Mission's objective monitoring of the enjoyment of these rights as well as incidences of threats or

attacks, including adherence to international human rights standards by law enforcement agencies during peaceful assemblies; the ability of journalists and human rights defenders to carry out their work, and potential rights violations on the grounds of religion or belief, including discriminatory practices.

In its work on fundamental freedoms, the Mission relies on its network of field offices across the country and the links it has established over the years with local communities, human rights defenders, civil society organizations, journalists and religious/belief actors. Drawing on these sustained relationships, the

Mission provides training to key partners, including law enforcement agencies, human rights organizations and activists, members of the judiciary, media, religious communities and political representatives.

Freedom of Assembly and Association

Freedom of assembly and association refers to the right of every person to assemble peacefully and to associate with others to express, promote, pursue and defend common interests and ideals. These rights are intrinsic to democratic societies and are explicitly recognized in certain OSCE Human Dimension

Commitments as well as major international human rights instruments. Specifically, freedom of peaceful assembly includes the right to organize and participate in gatherings, protests, demonstrations and other forms of collective expression, while freedom of association encompasses the rights to form, join, and participate in groups, organizations or associations including trade unions and civil society organizations without undue governments' interference.

Co-operating closely with relevant authorities and institutions, the Mission engages in extensive advocacy and provides technical support throughout BiH to improve the legislative framework governing the enjoyment of freedom of peaceful assembly and association, ensuring greater alignment with OSCE commitments, other international standards, and the Constitution of BiH.

At the same time, the Mission works to prevent the introduction of harmful or regressive legislation affecting the ability of human rights defenders, communities and organizations to carry out their vital functions and participate in BiH's democracy. With Mission support, seven out of 12 BiH freedom of assembly laws had been harmonized with international human rights standards by mid-2025. To understand the efficacy of these laws, the Mission systematically monitors and [reports](#) on their application, namely in terms of the enjoyment of the right to peaceful assembly. Direct engagement with law enforcement agencies,

institutions and human rights defenders complements this monitoring.

In addition, to improve the application of these laws and adherence to international standards, the Mission provides regular training and professional development opportunities to representatives of law enforcement agencies, judiciary and civil society organizations.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion protects the holders of theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. This right includes the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, through worship, teaching, practice and observance.

The unique diversity, context and complexity of BiH highlight the importance of the Mission's commitment to the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief. A lack of interfaith understanding, coupled with systemic obstacles to the enjoyment of this right, continues to hinder inter-religious relations. In doing so, the Mission identifies, monitors and works to address obstacles to the enjoyment of this right. Prevailing challenges often include attacks motivated by religion or discriminatory practices based on religion or belief, particularly targeting minority communities.

Recognizing the important role of religious actors, the Mission liaises with key stakeholders

to support inter-religious dialogue both to promote and protect this right as part of broader reconciliation efforts. The Mission further conducts capacity-building on the right to freedom of religion or belief, including awareness-raising on relevant international human rights standards and the relevant domestic legal framework.

Freedom of Media

Freedom of media protects the independence and plurality of the news media, encompassing the production, publication and dissemination of journalistic content across all mediums and platforms. Media freedom is a fundamental component of freedom of expression and the right to free access to information, and, as such, is essential for democracies. Media must be independent from political interference and economic capture, and must be free to uphold professional journalistic standards through self-regulation and independent regulatory authorities. Media freedom also entails media pluralism, meaning the presence of multiple media sources as well as diverse and inclusive content.

The Mission strives to promote a safe working environment for all journalists and media professionals in BiH, recognizing that journalists' safety is essential for media freedoms, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring that citizens have access to accurate and diverse information. In pursuing this aim, the Mission supports existing mechanisms for the protection of journalists, such as the network of contact

points within prosecutors' offices and police departments. The Mission's human rights officers across BiH monitor threats, intimidation, and harassment directed at journalists and conduct relevant advocacy, including with authorities.

The Mission collaborates with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, including through joint public statements condemning attacks on journalists and by calling for measures to safeguard journalists and guarantee freedom of expression.

In response to the 2023 recriminalization of defamation in the Republika Srpska Criminal Code, the Mission closely monitors all criminal cases initiated against journalists and human rights defenders to follow cases and developments affecting media and civil society. Complementing this, the Mission monitors the use of civil lawsuits brought against journalists and media outlets in BiH and call for the protection of media freedoms.

By following the adoption and amendment of legislation regulating the media, the Mission advocates for strong safeguards for freedom of media and freedom of expression, protection of journalists and transparency in media ownership. The Mission promotes media law among the students in BiH through its annual Media Law School as well as through the upcoming specialized master programme at the University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Law.

For more information, scan the QR code.



OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Fra Andela Zvizdovića 1, UNITIC Tower A
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tel: +387 33 952 100
Fax: +387 33 442 479
press.ba@osce.org
<https://bih.osce.org/>

Follow OSCE Mission to BiH

