

In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic and the 2021 elections, the EU urged the authorities to make further efforts to prevent, protect and provide services to groups in vulnerable situations and to victims of violence.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Albania continues to fulfil the conditions for opening accession negotiations. Discussions continue in view of adopting the Negotiating Framework and holding the first Intergovernmental Conference as soon as possible. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities in 2021, notably in the context of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council, as well as its sub-committees.

4. EU financial engagement: During the reporting period, the EU pursued the implementation of programmes and projects in the field of human rights and democracy.

An Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) project implemented by the OSCE (EUR 650,000) contributed to strengthening the public broadcaster and the public school of journalism, while three IPA 2020 (approx. EUR 600,000) projects aimed at enhancing investigative journalism and reinforcing independent journalism through multimedia and data quality. The implementation of additional support (approx. EUR 799,000) deployed from the IPA 2018-2019 instrument for the recovery of children and families in vulnerable situations – including children with disabilities – affected by the COVID-19 pandemic continued. The IPA 2019 programme on Social Inclusion with a budget of EUR 70 million is focusing on families in vulnerable situations, including those affected by COVID-19 crisis, Roma and Egyptian families, and older persons. Regarding property rights, implementation of two projects under the IPA 2020 (EUR 1.36 million) has started.

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) contributed with a budget of EUR 2.2 million supporting in particular the rights of the child, promotion of the rights of LGBTI persons, human rights of persons in detention, inclusive education, missing persons and the role of civil society in the democratic process.

The IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme provided a budget of EUR 3.44 million of EU contribution with projects focusing notably on youth and civil society's role in implementation of human rights, support to investigative journalism and independent media institutions, as well as social inclusion.

Cooperation under the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility phase II continued with focus on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime, promoting equality, human rights and social inclusion. The allocation for Albania is more than EUR 4 million.

5. Multilateral context: Albania continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. Following the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council (in September 2019), national institutions engaged in a dialogue on human rights in order to better integrate human rights in strategic and development policies and to identify focus areas. Several Council of Europe and OSCE missions took place during the reporting period.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights and democracy is largely in place and overall in line with the relevant international and European standards. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to adopt a comprehensive strategic framework and the protection of human rights continues to be uneven across the country. Significant reforms are needed to bring the Constitution in line with the European Convention on Human Rights, ensuring that all citizens are able to exercise their political rights (Sejdić-Finci ECtHR case law), and to overcome the practice of ‘two schools under one roof’ thus guaranteeing non-discriminatory, inclusive and quality education for all children. On freedom of expression and of the media, no progress was made on ensuring the appropriate judicial follow-up to cases of threats and violence against journalists, especially in the *Republika Srpska* entity, or on ensuring the financial sustainability of the public broadcasting system. Challenges persist as regards the freedom of assembly, particularly in the *Republika Srpska* entity. Gender-based violence, ill treatment of detainees and the protection of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma, continued to be issues of concern. The protection of rights and social inclusion of LGBTI persons remain to be improved. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to amend the Law on the Human Rights Ombudsperson to improve its independence and effectiveness and designate it as a national preventive mechanism against torture and ill-treatment – an international obligation of the country.

The second half of 2021 was marked by a prolonged political crisis, with the blockage of Presidency, Parliament and Council of Ministers by *Republika Srpska*-based political parties, which also took initiatives towards withdrawing the entity from key State-level agencies. This severely undermined the functionality of political institutions and led to a standstill on reforms on the EU path. Since the 2018 elections, the Federation entity government has acted in a caretaker role. No progress was made in improving electoral standards and ensuring transparency of political party financing.

For more information, please refer to the [European Commission’s 2021 Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to closely monitor the respect for human rights, including freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations including persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality, as part of the EU integration process. Six out of the fourteen key priorities set out in the 2019 [Commission Opinion](#) on the EU membership application of Bosnia and Herzegovina focus on fundamental rights. They call upon the country to strengthen non-discrimination and gender equality, ensure the prohibition of torture, guarantee freedom of expression and media freedom, improve the protection and inclusion of groups in vulnerable situations, and promote an environment conducive to reconciliation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Stabilisation and Association (SA) Parliamentary Committee was held in June 2021, after a five-year stalemate. The SA Council held its fourth meeting in July 2021. The blockage of State institutions impeded the holding of the SA Committee in November and of the SA subcommittee on Justice, freedom and security in December. Since the outbreak of the political crisis, the EU has engaged in intense advocacy and facilitation efforts, as well as in high-level visits to engage with political actors with the

aim to ease tensions and find solutions to the crisis. In parallel, the EU and the United States, alongside the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR, have worked closely with political stakeholders to facilitate constitutional and electoral reforms. These reforms aim at ending ethnic- and residence-based discrimination, thus complying with the Sejdić-Finci ECtHR case law, and ensure more transparent, inclusive and democratic elections, addressing OSCE/ODIHR and CoE Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations.

4. EU financial engagement: EU support via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance focuses on the areas of judiciary (EUR 6.4 million), gender equality and non-discrimination, and support to persons in vulnerable situations (including children, persons with disabilities, Roma), as well as support to civil society and the media. EU funding contributes to accounting for missing persons (EUR 3 million to support the International Commission on Missing Persons), supporting and monitoring the processing of war crime cases (EUR 5 million), and fighting against corruption, including in healthcare (EUR 1.5 million). EU funds are helping to strengthen the institutional mechanisms for gender equality (EUR 500,000) and fighting discrimination, empowering persons in vulnerable situations (EUR 1 million). Bosnia and Herzegovina is making good progress in the implementation of the EU-funded Regional Housing Programme (RHP, EUR 65 million regionally), which continues to provide durable housing solutions to refugees in vulnerable situations, internally displaced persons and returnees. Around 1,900 vulnerable families have already obtained a new home, and around 3,100 housing units are planned to be constructed by June 2023.

The Civil Society and Media Facility, (EUR 11.5 million) also continues to support 25 projects for the capacity building of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the areas of health, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship, environment, youth, culture, local economy, women's rights, freedom of expression, anti-corruption and political pluralism.

17 projects funded via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUR 3 million) continue supporting women victims of violence, capacity building of gender equality commissions at the municipal level, capacity building of women human rights defenders, protection of rights and psychosocial support to LGBTI persons, protection and promotion of the rights of the child, consumer rights and youth.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility has financed activities aimed at strengthening human rights treatment of persons in detention; preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings; promoting diversity and equality (members of national minorities and LGBTI persons); quality education for all; and freedom of expression and freedom of the media. A new EU-funded reception centre for migrants and refugees was opened in Lipa (Bihać) in November 2021, with a capacity to host up to 1,500 persons in need.

5. Multilateral context: Bosnia and Herzegovina continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. Bosnia and Herzegovina did not systematically follow up to the 204 accepted recommendations from the November 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In October 2021, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued 79 recommendations and three requests addressing issues of concern as regards Bosnia and Herzegovina's application of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.