

Bosnia and Herzegovina



People gathered to protest violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the failure of state institutions that react slowly to prevent femicide. Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11 October 2023.

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In March 2024, the European Council [agreed to open EU accession negotiations](#) with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The EU did not [condition](#) this decisive step on [implementation](#) of European Court of Human Rights rulings on discrimination against Jews, Roma, and others. BiH authorities made at best slow progress in tackling these and other rights challenges, including femicide and war crimes accountability.

Discrimination and Intolerance

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its 2024 review of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed concern that displaced people and refugees returning to pre-war areas [face](#) hate speech, physical attacks, and employment discrimination. CERD also [found](#) persistent discrimination against Roma in employment, education, and access to public services, including obstacles to health care for women and girls.

Progress in hate crime trials is slow and convictions are rare. Of 19 ongoing trials in September, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) recorded [zero convictions](#). An OSCE study published in March found fears of reprisal, lack of trust in the justice system, and inadequate reporting mechanisms explain why many hate crimes go [unreported](#).

Disability Rights

An April BiH Ombudsman's [report](#) highlighted rights violations experienced by people with disabilities in institutions, including arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement. Bosnia and

Herzegovina has yet to harmonize laws affecting people with disabilities with relevant international treaties.

Accountability for War Crimes

Progress towards prosecuting war crimes in local courts stagnated. In January, the BiH Council of Ministers extended until 2025 the [deadline](#) to implement the Revised National War Crimes Strategy.

According to the OSCE, as of September 2024, there were 226 cases pending before all courts in BiH. There were first-instance judgments in 11 cases during the first nine months of 2024, with 16 defendants found guilty and 8 acquitted. Final judgments were rendered in 14 cases during the same period, with 7 defendants found guilty.

As of September 2024, there were 53 ongoing cases involving conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), 3 with final judgments in which 4 defendants were found guilty on CRSV charges.

In May, amendments to the Federation BiH (FBiH) [Law on the Protection of Civilian Victims of War](#) granted special status to children born of wartime rape, giving them access to health care, education, employment, and housing. However, relevant laws had not harmonized across the country at time of writing. In January, the heads of the EU, Council of Europe, and OSCE in BiH [called](#) on Republika Srpska to end the practice of seeking court costs from victims whose request for compensation is denied.

A new [history curriculum](#) for elementary schools for the start of the 2024-25 school year in the Republika Srpska portrays Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic as heroes and omits their convictions for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

Asylum Seekers and Migrants

Bosnia and Herzegovina accepted [more than 4,200 “readmissions”](#) of third-country nationals in 2023, including over 1,200 from Afghanistan, under a bilateral agreement with Croatia, according to March 2024 data. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s asylum system [is limited and largely ineffective](#) and asylum seekers often [face](#) inadequate [reception conditions](#), which can trigger involuntary returns.

Gender-Based Violence, Including Domestic Violence

Gender-based violence, [including against women with disabilities](#), is a serious concern. [Cases](#) of femicide in 2024 highlighted the authorities’ failure to prevent and sanction violence even in cases in which the perpetrator has a known history of violence against the complainant.

BiH lacks national and entity-level laws criminalizing domestic violence. In June, the FBiH parliament adopted [a four-year strategy](#) on preventing and combating domestic violence, and a draft national law was pending at this writing. In Republika Srpska, a draft law on [femicide](#) was withdrawn because conservative activists took issue with the term “gender-based violence.” The RS president [tweeted](#) support for the claims of protesting organizations that the law propagates “gender ideology,” a politicized term often used to justify restrictions on the rights of women and LGBT people.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

While anti-LGBT attacks and discrimination persist across the country, the situation in Republika Srpska stands out. There has been no accountability for a 2023 March [attack](#) on activists in Banja

Luka, and no official LGBT [events](#) have been held in Republika Srpska since the incident. The Republika Srpska government is seeking to [remove](#) existing references to gender identity from its criminal code.

BiH's first ever [shelter](#) for LGBT people opened in April where victims of hate attacks can stay temporarily and obtain psychological and legal support.

Freedom of Media

[Attacks](#) on journalists and political pressure on independent media are common throughout the country. The BiH Constitutional Court in January 2024 [struck down](#) long criminal sentences for defamation contained in a Republika Srpska law but upheld the crime of defamation.

Air Pollution and Human Rights

In July 2024, a court in Republika Srpska upheld for a fourth time the [suspension](#) of the environmental permit for construction of a new coal-fired power plant at the Ugljevik facility. Meanwhile, after a decade of activism, a coal-burning coke-production plant in Zenica was [decommissioned](#) in March 2024, improving air quality and reducing pollution levels.