

The State of the World's Human Rights; Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025

Background

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) continued to experience political instability.

In February, Republika Srpska (RS) authorities passed laws preventing state-level institutions, including police and judiciary, from operating in RS territory. The Court of BH temporarily suspended certain laws and ruled that others were unconstitutional.

In August, the Court of BH sentenced the President of RS, Milorad Dodik, to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban on holding public office for defying decisions issued by the UN High Representative in BH. His mandate was officially terminated in August and extraordinary presidential elections were held in RS in November.

The RS National Assembly (RSNA) rejected the court ruling and called for a referendum to ask RS citizens if they accepted the ruling and termination of Milorad Dodik's mandate. The EU said a referendum on court decisions ran "counter to the rule of law". The authorities decided to postpone the referendum to 2026.

In September, the BH Council of Ministers finally adopted the EU Reform Agenda 2024-2027, thereby preventing another major cut to funds from the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

Freedom of expression and association

Human rights defenders, civil society activists and independent journalists, particularly in RS, were frequently subjected to verbal threats, online and offline abuse, and aggressive and sustained smear campaigns, including by senior public officials.

In March, the RSNA adopted the Law on Special Registry and Publicity of the Work of NGOs, which required non-profit organizations to enrol in a special registry, subjected them to increased legal oversight, and potentially classified them as "agents of foreign influence". The RSNA also adopted changes to the RS Criminal Code, introducing a new criminal offence of "disrespecting or failing to implement decisions of institutions and bodies" of RS, which civil society groups said presented a major threat to freedom of expression. In May, the Constitutional Court of BH struck down both laws as unconstitutional. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders called the measures a part of a

“deliberate policy” to delegitimize criticism of the ruling party and “further demonize and undermine civil society”.

In August, journalist Nataša Miljanović Zubac was arrested and briefly detained on charges of “disclosing secret information” over social media posts alleging corruption and crime among members of the police and judiciary. The Court of BH, however, ruled that there were no grounds for suspicion that Nataša Miljanović Zubac had committed the offence.

Discrimination

In March, the RSNA adopted amendments to the RS Criminal Code removing the term “gender identity” as a protected characteristic from articles criminalizing hate crimes and hate speech. Civil society groups warned that the amendments would erode existing legal protections.

In September, a Council of Europe delegation visited BH to discuss the execution of European Court of Human Rights judgments, which found the power-sharing arrangements in the country discriminatory. People who did not identify as one of the country’s “constituent peoples”, namely Bosniak, Croat or Serb, continued to be denied adequate political representation.

In April, the authorities and civil society groups started a consultation on the Action Plan on Social Inclusion of Roma 2026-2030, but no concrete progress was made before the end of the year.

Violence against women and girls

In March, the Federation of BH parliament adopted the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women aimed at strengthening prevention, introducing more robust protection measures and improving support for victims of violence. Women’s rights organizations welcomed the adoption but warned that comprehensive implementation required additional education and training of law enforcement officials.

In June, following months of campaigning by women’s rights organizations, the Federation of BH parliament amended the Criminal Code to formally recognize femicide as a distinct crime and introduce harsher penalties for perpetrators.

Despite noted progress, legal protection and access to rights remained inconsistent for victims living in different parts of the country.

There was a notable increase in online violence targeting women. The Council of Europe called on the authorities to step up efforts to reform the legal and institutional framework to combat digital violence.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

While BH marked the 30th anniversary of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, politicians in RS continued to publicly deny genocide and war crimes and glorify convicted war criminals.¹

In May, the Court of BH sentenced Vojin Pavlović, head of an RS-based NGO, to two and a half years' imprisonment for inciting hatred by denying the Srebrenica genocide and glorifying convicted war criminals. This was the first conviction for genocide denial since the UN High Representative imposed the genocide denial legislation in 2021.

More than 7,500 people remained missing as a result of the Bosnian war of 1992-1995.

