

# UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OSCE MISSION TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA SUBMISSION

## **Background**

In accordance with its mandate outlined in Article 13 of Annex VI to the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Peace Agreement), the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) monitors the human rights situation in the country. To assess the progress made following [the recommendations made under the Third Cycle](#), the Mission submits a report for the Universal Periodic Review.

## **Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law**

### **A – Cross cutting issues**

#### ***Equality and non-discrimination***

Despite some legislative and institutional developments, discrimination remains a widespread issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). According to a 2020 Mission survey, nearly one in three persons responded as having been exposed to unequal treatment.<sup>1</sup> The Mission notes the prevalence of discrimination and deeply rooted negative stereotypes against Roma; individuals and groups who are numerical ethnic minorities in their communities, including returnees, religious minorities, and migrants; and on the basis of sexual orientation or identity and gender.<sup>2</sup> The Mission's recent findings reveal increase in the number of lawsuits and rendered judgments pursuant to the State-level Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (LPD), including a prevalence of discrimination cases in the area of employment and a greater incidence of male than female plaintiffs.<sup>3</sup>

Combating discrimination remains a challenge due to numerous issues, including the lack of unified data collection between the Ombudsman Institution (OI), Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH (MHRR) and the judiciary; under-reporting; insufficient research on public needs; a lack of consistency in the application of the LPD including divergence of court practice,<sup>4</sup> evidencing a lack of unified understanding among judges and legal professionals; and insufficient cooperation with civil society organizations (CSO). No significant progress was noted in the MHRR's exercise of its anti-discrimination mandate during the reporting period. Failure to develop strategic human rights and non-discrimination documents is stymied by the political situation and insufficient internal capacities.<sup>5</sup> The Mission notes the OI's failure to exercise its competencies, which includes initiating or intervening in court proceedings, and to advocate for the implementation of its recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Mission's 2020: "Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Public Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences" report.](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> The Mission's 2023 ["Analysis of Anti-Discrimination Case Law in BiH for the Period 2018 - 2021"](#).

<sup>4</sup> Divergence in court practice is evident in several areas, notably those concerning mobbing, the determination of the existence of harm in discrimination cases, the awarding of non-pecuniary damages, and continuing questions regarding burdens of proof.

<sup>5</sup> The Mission's 2019 ["Assessment of the Work of the BiH Institutions Combating Discrimination"](#).

On positive note, the 2023 Amendments to the BiH Law on Human Rights Ombudsman established the national preventive mechanism (NPM),<sup>6</sup> provided for greater financial autonomy, and increased the OI's promotional role and co-operation with CSOs. That said, due to a lack of sufficient resources, the NPM is not yet fully operational, even 16 years following ratification of OPCAT.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Development, the environment, and business human rights***

Regarding anti-corruption, the Mission notes limited progress in establishing effective legislative, strategic and institutional frameworks. The Mission acknowledges the recent adoption of the BiH Law on Conflict of Interest (CoI), noting, however, the need for further alignment with international standards.<sup>8</sup> Challenges regarding the F BiH, RS and the BDBiH CoI legislation remain. Only three cantons have adopted legislation on asset declaration and property origin.<sup>9</sup> The Mission notes need for adoption and implementation of whistle-blowers' protection legislation. The cantonal anti-corruption offices (ACO), along with the BiH Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination and BDBiH, should form the institutional backbone for corruption prevention; however, the quality of these mechanisms varies.<sup>10</sup>

Air pollution remains one of the most pressing health concerns, as the country holds the fifth highest air pollution mortality rate in the world.<sup>11</sup> The authorities' efforts to tackle this issue are noted, including the adoption of the 2023 F BiH legislation package,<sup>12</sup> as well as both entities' 2022-2032 strategies for protection of the environment and the strengthening of air quality monitoring capacities.<sup>13</sup> The Mission underlines the need for ratification of the Pollutant Release and Transfer Register Protocol to the Aarhus Convention as a key step in addressing air and other types of pollution.

The recent adoption of the [2021-2025 Proposal of Framework Guidelines for the Implementation of UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) is a commendable commitment to human rights. The Mission, however, notes BiH's failure to include the duty to address trafficking in human beings (THB) for the purpose of labour exploitation in supply chains, with only one out of 21 strategic measures in the 2020-2023 Strategy for Combatting THB addressing this issue.

## **B – Civil and political rights**

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<sup>6</sup> Designating the NPM is [one of 14 key priorities for the country to fulfil in view of opening EU accession negotiations](#) (Key priority 10: Ensure the right to life and prohibition of torture, notably by (...) (b) designate a national preventive mechanism against torture and ill-treatment) and commitment from the UN OPCAT. BiH ratified the OPCAT in October 2008

<sup>7</sup> Despite the clear obligation stemming from OPCAT Article 17 to maintain, designate or establish a national preventive mechanism for the prevention of torture at the domestic level at least one year after the entry into force, in 2012, BiH made a declaration under Article 24 to postpone designation for the three years.

<sup>8</sup> Namely, in relation to appointments to the CoI Commission and its decision-making capacity, definitions of connected persons, and handling of asset declarations

<sup>9</sup> Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Una-Sana cantons

<sup>10</sup> Six ACOs have been established, led by Sarajevo Canton; Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj and Canton 10 office are not operational; four cantonal ACOs (West-Herzegovina, Herzegovina-Neretva, Bosnia-Podrinje, and Central Bosnia) still need to be established

<sup>11</sup> According to data provided by the World Health Organization

<sup>12</sup> This law aims to strengthen the renewable energy sector, improve energy efficiency and, by extension, reduce air pollution

<sup>13</sup> The F BiH Hydrometeorological Institute has increased the number of air quality measuring stations from 21 in 2020 to 32 in 2023, whilst the RS Republic Hydrometeorological Institute added two new stations in 2023

## ***Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law***

The Mission has observed limited progress in efforts to strengthen the integrity, transparency and accountability of the judiciary. The version of the integrity-related amendments to the Law on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of BiH (HJPC BiH) adopted in September 2023 actually gutted many of the standards and provisions provided in the original draft,<sup>14</sup> and implementation is stalled. Development of the new HJPC BiH Law and Law on the Court(s) lack transparency. Public trust in the judiciary is further eroded by inconsistent judicial appointments, which often give undue weight to ethnicity at the expense of competence; lenient sanctioning for serious disciplinary wrongdoings with no deterrent effect; and several high-level judicial officials facing criminal proceedings. Additionally, unfilled vacancies in the BiH Constitutional Court hinder the court's inability to operate at full capacity and protect citizens' fundamental rights, with key legal issues pending.

The Mission notes persisting concerns regarding prosecution of war crimes. The 2023 deadline for completion of war crimes cases set by the Revised National War Crimes Strategy was not met, and it is unlikely new 2025 deadline will be honored. Approximately 40 percent of all pre- and post-indictments cases are impeded by one or more suspects residing out of sight BiH, primarily in Serbia and Croatia, from which they cannot be extradited.

Despite existing mechanism to address compensation within criminal proceedings, the judiciary persistently fails to ensure victims' access to compensation. In the over 700 war crimes cases adjudicated to date, compensation is awarded in only 19.<sup>15</sup> The Mission recommends the establishment of a unified framework to replace the patchwork of existing laws and ensure support to victims, free from discrimination, including based on place of residence. Recently adopted legislation on civilian victims of war recognizes children who were born as a consequence of wartime rape as victims.<sup>16</sup> The particularly restrictive five-year deadline for submitting a request to obtain victim status in the RS Law on Protection of Victims of Wartime Torture has impeded victims' redress.<sup>17</sup> The Mission notes the unfair practice in the RS of seeking reimbursement for court costs from war victims barred by statutes of limitations from seeking compensation in civil proceedings. BiH has also failed to implement 2019 UN Committee Against Torture Decision, requiring BiH to compensate a victim of wartime rape, issue a public apology and establish a country-wide reparations scheme.

Significant challenges are noted in the judiciary's response to organized crime and corruption, including inefficient trial management practices and excessive length of proceedings; relatively low numbers and poorly drafted indictments and verdicts; inappropriate plea agreements and inadequate sanctioning. The Mission observes some limited improvements in terms gradually increasing numbers of indictments and in sanctioning practices.<sup>18</sup>

## ***Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life***

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<sup>14</sup> The original draft law had been positively assessed by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission); its opinion on the new comprehensive is expected to be issued in June 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Based on data gathered through the Mission's comprehensive trial monitoring program.

<sup>16</sup> As a result of years of advocacy by victims' associations, both the Brčko District (BD) (2022) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) (2023) adopted laws that recognize children who were born as a consequence of wartime rape as victims.

<sup>17</sup> The RS Law on Protection of Victims of Wartime Torture stipulates a five-years deadline, which expired on 5 October 2023.

<sup>18</sup> According to data from the [HJPC BiH Annual Reports](#), in 2020 indictments for eight high-level corruption charges were raised; with six [in 2021](#); 17 [in 2022](#); and 20 [in 2023](#).

The Mission has observed several failures in terms of respect for freedom of association. This includes the 2023 FBiH Draft Law on Financing of Civil Society Organizations, which introduced restrictions on the ability of unregistered associations to access funds and resources. The RS Draft Law on the Special Registry and Transparency of the Work of Non-Profit Organizations, often referred to as the “foreign agents’ law”, initiated in 2022 and still in a draft version,<sup>19</sup> has already had chilling effects on CSOs. The latter is assessed as a major threat to freedom of association.<sup>20</sup>

The protection of human rights defenders remains weak, including in terms of the judicial response in some instances, for example, following an attack on a group of LGBTI supporters in Banja Luka in March 2023. Mission monitoring records about ten attacks on human rights defenders annually.<sup>21</sup> In the context of incendiary rhetoric by public officials, attacks on journalists have increased, including in terms of online threats, smear campaigns, property damage, and even physical assaults. Instead of protecting and promoting civic space and ensuring a safe and enabling environment, in 2023, the RS re-criminalized defamation, and few cantons are working towards declaring the internet as a public space.<sup>22</sup>

Since 2020, four human rights compliant laws on peaceful assemblies are adopted,<sup>23</sup> with four more in the process of adoption.<sup>24</sup> The [RS](#) and [Canton Sarajevo](#), where the highest number of contentious assemblies take place, failed to advance current legislation.<sup>25</sup> Adoption of the [FBiH law](#) on peaceful assembly has been stalled since 2017 due to political disagreements over the FBiH’s competencies to regulate this matter.

In terms of freedom of religion or belief, the Mission notes several structural impediments to the enjoyment of this right, noting disparities in the exercise of religious rights of men and women. While a 2021 BiH Constitutional Court (CC) ruling allowed Muslim men in the BiH Armed Forces to have beards as part of their religious practice,<sup>26</sup> a 2024 BiH CC decision held that the ban by the BiH Armed Forces on wearing the hijab is in line with the BiH Constitution and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Mission notes a significant setback to institutional inter-religious dialogue in BiH Inter-religious Council with the 2023 withdrawal of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The government of BiH and BiH Islamic Community have not concluded an Agreement<sup>27</sup>, while the Serbian Orthodox and

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<sup>19</sup> At the time of writing, the RS Law on the Special Registry and Transparency of the Work of Non-Profit Organizations has been temporarily withdrawn from parliamentary procedure.

<sup>20</sup> In 2023, the OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission issued a [Joint Opinion](#), followed by the OSCE/ODIHR issuing a more comprehensive [Note](#) warning about the effects of foreign agents-type laws on the enjoyment of freedom of association.

<sup>21</sup> The Mission has increased its monitoring of the situation of human rights defenders in line with the OSCE Guidelines following the 2021 Joint [Declaration](#) on Protecting and Supporting Civil Society At-Risk, signed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

<sup>22</sup> Sarajevo Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva and Una Sana Canton, while Posavina and Canton 10 already adopted this legislation

<sup>23</sup> In the BDBiH (2020), Zenica-Doboj Canton (2023), Central Bosnia Canton, Una-Sana Canton and Canton 10 (2024).

<sup>24</sup> Posavina Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, Herzegovina Neretva and West Herzegovina Canton.

<sup>25</sup> Canton Sarajevo drafted two substandard drafts (in 2019 and 2021) that did not adequately reflect the applicable international human rights standards. This was reflected in a letter that the OSCE, EU, OHR and the US Embassy sent to the Canton Sarajevo Minister of Interior in early 2022. Republika Srpska also supplied a new draft (in 2019) that the OSCE ODIHR assessed as incompatible with international standards.

<sup>26</sup> The 2017 BiH Constitutional Court ruling allowed Muslim men in the BiH Border Police to wear beards.

<sup>27</sup> The Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Religious Communities foresees that the state and its entities may sign a basic agreement with individual religious communities to govern their rights. The Islamic Community submitted its draft proposal to the BiH Presidency in 2010, but this has been blocked for years now, due to political obstructions from the Presidency.

Catholic Church have. In the absence of relevant legislation, the restitution of expropriated religious property remains systematically unresolved.

The Mission continues to observe nationalistic and divisive rhetoric, grave ethnic tensions particularly in areas with religious and ethnic minorities, frequent bias-motivated incidents especially during religious holidays and disputed markings and commemorations. Both hate speech and hate crimes suffer from ineffective prosecutions resulting in a high rate of impunity, which in turn leads to under-reporting. Political leaders and other individuals in positions of power are less likely to face prosecution for incitement to hatred, which is contrary to the Rabat Plan of Action.<sup>28</sup> The Mission notes that hate speech instances are prosecuted under “incitement to hatred” provisions, which, as of 2021, include genocide denial and the glorification of war criminals. Notably, these provisions are used incorrectly to prosecute hate crimes despite existing hate crimes provisions.

### ***Prohibition of all forms of slavery***

The Mission acknowledges the establishment of anti-trafficking co-ordination mechanisms at the state, entity, cantonal and district levels but also has identified a number of pressing concerns related to combating THB, such as the inadequate qualification of crimes and failures to investigate cases promptly and effectively. Issues regarding the confiscation of proceeds of trafficking crime and prosecution of legal persons and of the users of the services of THB victims persist. The Mission notes that the judiciary and law enforcement generally treat victims as sources of information rather than rights-holders entitled to redress, with compensation awarded only occasionally.

## **C – Economic, social and cultural rights**

### ***Right to an adequate standard of living***

The Mission notes progress towards adequate housing, notably with the adoption of legislation in the RS, BDBiH and four cantons that provides solid a foundation for independent and sustainable housing and combat poverty.<sup>29</sup> The Mission also notes the adoption of some social housing strategies.<sup>30</sup>

The Mission notes discrepancy in legislative and policy measures and persisting challenges in access to healthcare and social protection of socially vulnerable individuals and groups. The Mission notes some progress with the establishment of social welfare institutes in both entities.<sup>31</sup> To combat poverty and inequality and improve the social protection system, needs assessments have to be institutionalised, as this would create the foundation for knowledge-based, sustainable and needs-oriented policymaking. The Mission notes the insufficiency of social benefits, in light of growing demands for social assistance and an increase in the number of persons in need. War veterans are still entitled to much favourable conditions and treatment with regard to pensions and unemployment benefits. The Mission acknowledges the on-going FBiH social protection system reforms aimed at reducing inequalities between vulnerable categories.<sup>32</sup> The Mission recommends transforming the current status-based social protection system into a needs-based system in order to respond to such needs through

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<sup>28</sup> [Rabat Plan of Action - Istanbul Process 16/18 \(istanbulprocess1618.info\)](https://istanbulprocess1618.info).

<sup>29</sup> Una Sana, Central Bosnia, Zenica Dobož and Bosnian Podrinje cantons.

<sup>30</sup> RS and Central Bosnia Canton, while BD BiH legislation is developed but pending adoption.

<sup>31</sup> RS Social Protection Institute established in 2024. Similar ongoing efforts in the FBiH.

<sup>32</sup> Adoption of the FBiH Law on Material Support for the Families with Children in October 2022, with ongoing revisions of the law initiated in 2024; the adoption of the FBiH Law on Civilian Victims of War in July 2023; and the current process of adoption of the FBiH Law on Material Support for People with Disabilities



a rights-based approach.

### ***Right to education***

The Mission highlights the need to ensure inclusive and quality education by transiting from a traditional content-oriented approach towards a contemporary student-oriented one.<sup>33</sup> The Mission, thus, developed a framework for comprehensive curriculum reform as a foundation for the needed shift and based on it supports on-going curriculum reform processes.<sup>34</sup> Some limited progress is noted in terms of the adoption of internal mechanisms for combating discrimination,<sup>35</sup> as well as the development of a guide on gender bias practices in the teaching process.<sup>36</sup> The Mission notes the failure to implement relevant court decisions and eliminate the discriminatory practice of “two-schools-under-one-roof”.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, construction of new school buildings leads to mono-ethnic schools and further segregation. The RS authorities’ continue to refuse to allow Bosniaks to name their language, despite a favourable BiH CC decision.<sup>38</sup> To address this, Bosniak parents from Liplje (Zvornik) and Janja (Bijeljina) submitted anti-discrimination lawsuits before RS courts. The results are pending. In FBiH, the introduction of Serbian language in Glamoč remains pending since 2003, administratively and politically burdened despite limited developments in other areas.<sup>39</sup>

The Mission acknowledges the recent adoption of the curriculum for the elective school subject of Romani Language and Culture in Tuzla Canton, which helps strengthen the inclusiveness of education.<sup>40</sup> Respective action plans on the social inclusion of Roma have been adopted in four cantons,<sup>41</sup> BDBiH and RS.

## **D – Rights of specific persons or groups**

### ***Women***

The Mission acknowledges the adoption of the [2023 – 2027 BiH Gender Action Plan](#), the 2023 – 2027 Action Plan on 1325 and six cantonal action plans as providing a crucial framework for gender equality in BiH. The Mission notes improvements in the legislative framework for combating domestic violence in the recent years, including improving the harmonization of the the RS and BDBiH Criminal Codes with the Istanbul and [Lanzarote](#)

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<sup>33</sup> The widely applied traditional approach to teaching based on outdated curricula, along with ethnically one-sided and gender-biased learning and teaching materials, hinder students’ achievements, deter critical thinking and suppress respect for diversity and deepen social distance, impacting the prospects for social stability and cohesion. Low student achievements have been confirmed by the results of the international large-scale assessments (ILSA) and further exposed through the [struggles of online teaching amidst the COVID-19 pandemic PISA 2018](#). Report showed that half of the 15-year-old students in BiH are functionally illiterate, and [TIMSS 2019 that 24% of 4-graders are not reaching the lowest level of achievement in mathematics](#).

<sup>34</sup> Comprehensive curriculum reform is underway in five cantons, Sarajevo, Zenica-Doboj, West Herzegovina, Una-Sana, and Bosnian-Podrinje Canton-Goražde

<sup>35</sup> Adopted with the Mission’s support in Posavina, Herzegovina-Neretva, West Herzegovina, Sarajevo and Tuzla cantons, BDBiH, Zenica-Doboj and Bosnia-Podrinje Canton-Goražde.

<sup>36</sup> Una Sana Canton.

<sup>37</sup> FBiH Supreme Court, No. 58 0 Ps 085653 13 Rev from 29 August 2014 and The Supreme Court of FBiH 51 0 P 054522 21 Rev 2 from 31 August 2021

<sup>38</sup> The CC BiH decision (U7/15) held that, “the language is owned by the people who speak that language and therefore its name should reflect the wishes of a larger number of people who speak it”.

<sup>39</sup> Introduction of Serbian language in schools in Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo was carried out earlier.

<sup>40</sup> This is in accordance with legislation on national minorities and the BiH Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma (2021-2025).

<sup>41</sup> Herzegovina Neretva, Central Bosnia, Tuzla and Una-Sana cantons.

[conventions](#).<sup>42</sup> Recent attempts to adopt the new RS Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women was hindered by strong opposition by ultra-conservative non-governmental organizations,<sup>43</sup> resulting in withdrawal. Amendments to the FBiH Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural Code, as well as the FBiH Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, are pending the outcome of the legislative procedure.<sup>44</sup>

The Council of Europe Committee of the Parties of Istanbul Convention [asked for](#) immediate action to secure protection from and prevention and prosecution of gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>45</sup> Noted efforts include the introduction of a “person of trust” for victims, an obligation to carry out risk assessments after each reported incident, and free legal assistance.<sup>46</sup> The Mission notices limited progress in strengthening institutional responses to domestic violence and GBV.<sup>47</sup> Domestic violence is prosecuted as a criminal offence at all levels, while in the BDBiH it can be also charged as a misdemeanour. Mission data indicates inconsistent application of these provisions, including a low rate of proposed urgent protective measures and frequent suspended sentences. A lack of trust in the relevant institutions, including social welfare centres, law enforcement and judiciary, contributes to the perception that domestic violence is generally underreported.<sup>48</sup>

The results of the 2022 General Elections, the established 40 per cent quota of the underrepresented sex was respected only on the candidates lists. Political parties are of critical importance for encouraging women to take up positions not only in legislative and executive structures, and some parties have made certain improvements.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention); Council of Europe [Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#), (Lanzarote Convention).

<sup>43</sup> In January 2023, the Mission observed increased media activity by approximately 20 CSOs that frame themselves as protectors of family and traditional values. This group of organizations initiated an advocacy campaign that held that the draft law would introduce “LGBTI and gender ideology” into the legal system.

<sup>44</sup> Legislative changes to improve institutional responses to GBV have been in various stages of legislative processes, pending adoption from the previous FBiH governmental and parliamentary convocations, despite considerable pressure for adoption by key stakeholders and the public. Such legislative changes would bring FBiH legislation closer to standards set by the Istanbul Convention and improve protections for survivors of gender-based violence. In early April 2024, the FBiH Ministry of Justice informed the FBiH Parliament of plans to propose amendments to the relevant laws by end of June 2024.

<sup>45</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/ic-cp-inf-2022-7-cop-recommendation-bosnia-herzegovina-eng/1680a952ab> Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina considered and adopted the GREVIO’s (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Istanbul Convention and Recommendation on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available at [Ostali akti \(parlament.ba\)](#)

<sup>46</sup> As reflected in the amendments to RS and FBiH laws on protection from domestic violence.

<sup>47</sup> In August 2023, after several highly publicized cases of domestic violence, including femicide, the Mission and national stakeholders adopted commitments to immediate, strategic and systemic institutional actions for combating DV and GBV. Available at: [OSCE Mission to BiH Initiates Comprehensive Dialogue to Combat Gender-Based Violence](#); [OSCE assesses progress made in the implementation of commitments aimed at improving the fight against gender-based violence in BiH](#); [Pressing need to harmonize laws with international standards underscored at Conference on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence](#). The Mission leads the process of regularly reviewing the implementation of these commitments.

<sup>48</sup> Based on OSCE data, this is particularly true in relation to current partner violence, with a clear majority of women who have experienced such violence (84 per cent) contacting neither the police nor another organization. 2018, OSCE-led survey on violence against women: Bosnia and Herzegovina, table pg. XI, available at [Well-Being and Safety of Women.pdf \(osce.org\)](#)

<sup>49</sup> Increasing quotas for women in party organs, the most recent cases being of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP), which have introduced 40 per cent quotas for party organs, as well as other additional measures to secure gender parity in managing party structures. The SDP BiH developed the first political party Gender Action Plan.

### ***Persons with disabilities***

Persons with disabilities face significant obstacles in accessing health and social care services. There is no official data collection on their needs and actual status, which makes it difficult to determine what support is required. The Mission acknowledges the establishment of the Council for Persons with Disabilities as an advisory body to the BiH Council of Ministers. To fully implement its mandate, relevant authorities should allocate sufficient funds and create favourable conditions for its work.

### ***National minorities***

No actions are taken to ensure that national minorities can effectively exercise their political rights. Although the BiH Election Law guarantees a minimum of one seat for minorities comprising over three per cent of a constituency's population, the Mission notes downward trends in terms of reserved seats in recent election cycles, namely, only 17 municipalities/cities had reserved minorities seats in the 2020 election cycles, compared to 35 for the 2016 elections. The Mission highlights the need to amend the election law to ensure effective political participation of national minorities at different levels of government in BiH.