



Combating Gender-Based Violence

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina monitors the responses to gender-based violence, with a primary focus on domestic violence, wartime sexual violence and child victims of sexual violence, and helps domestic authorities improve their capacities towards prevention, prosecution and the protection of victims.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence remains a widespread and underreported phenomenon in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The Mission has identified serious concerns regarding inadequate implementation of the legislation and the lack of effective protection and assistance to victims. As noted in the Mission's report, *Response to Domestic Violence and Co-ordinated Victim Protection*, measures specifically intended for the protection of victims are rarely used and sanctions for offenders are often rather lenient. Other obstacles include the lack of effective co-operation among key actors, and the lack of reliable data, hindering the formulation of effective strategies to combat domestic violence.

The Mission's activities towards improving responses to domestic violence fall into three primary areas:

- promoting the appropriate identification and prosecution of domestic violence within the criminal justice system to ensure accountability for perpetrators;
- advocating for adequate protection and assistance to victims; and
- supporting the establishment of referral mechanisms that improve co-ordinated community responses in cases of domestic violence.

Wartime Sexual Violence

The Mission is committed to promoting, monitoring and assessing the prosecution, before domestic courts, of sexual violence and rape which took place during the 1992-1995 conflict in BiH. Amongst the trials before the Court of BiH and entity-level courts since 2004 concerning war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, relatively few have included

charges related to sexual violence, despite the vast scale of such atrocities. In addition, no official statistics have ever been kept regarding the prosecution of such crimes.

Through its monitoring, the Mission assesses how these sensitive cases are being processed by the criminal justice system, whether the existing legal framework and institutional resources are being used to the greatest effect, and how victims and witnesses are supported through the trial process. The Mission also advocates for the rights of victims and witnesses of war crimes, particularly with regard to the establishment of victim and witness support networks, to provide physical protection and emotional support to survivors of wartime crimes.

Child Victims of Sexual Violence

Child victims of sexual violence are amongst the most vulnerable victims justice actors face. These highly sensitive cases test the justice system's ability not only to prosecute the criminal act, but also to provide adequate victim protection. In numerous cases, the Mission has observed a lack of adequate, prompt and multi-disciplinary assistance provided to these victims both during and outside of the course of criminal proceedings. The Mission has also observed serious procedural shortcomings in the prosecution of such cases. The Mission works closely with the relevant authorities, including the police, judiciary, social welfare centres, education institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to raise their awareness of the domestic legal framework and international human rights obligations and also to provide practical guidance regarding psychological effects and other specificities of child victims.