



## **Key highlights of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025**

The Council of Europe, in collaboration with Bosnia and Herzegovina's national authorities, developed the Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025, which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 8 December 2021. In line with the priorities set out in the Reykjavík Declaration, this strategic programming instrument aims to align Bosnia and Herzegovina's legislation, institutions, and practices with European standards in human rights, rule of law, and democracy.

The implementation of the Action Plan supports the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in advancing several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as quality education (goal 4), gender equality (goal 5), decent work and economic growth (goal 8), reduced inequalities (goal 10), inclusiveness of cities and human settlements (goal 11), and peace, justice and strong institutions (goal 16).

The Committee of Ministers evaluates the effectiveness of the Action Plan through its Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM). The latter ensures that adjustments are made based on realities on the ground, involving civil society and non-state actors.

Currently, the Action Plan has €19.8 million in committed funding, covering 93% of its needs (€21.4 million).

The following section outlines the main outcomes of its implementation across six cross-cutting areas.



### **1. Securing human rights and fundamental freedoms**

#### ***Effective implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights***

Substantial progress has been made in executing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Key achievements can be found in the assistance provided to the Ministry of Justice, both on structural reforms and on new legislation (such as on the implementation of domestic court rulings and the excessive length of proceedings), the enhanced human rights education among legal professionals and universities, and the greater consistency in judicial practice regarding human rights standards, which was achieved through the piloting of a case-law department at the Cantonal Court in Sarajevo. Last but not least, in its new capacity as the National Preventive Mechanism, the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman was supported in developing an efficient and effective way to carry out its mandate and a rulebook to guide its functioning.



### **2. Advancing social justice, good health, and sustainable environment**

Under the Action Plan, an initial assessment was conducted identifying gaps in the legal framework for environmental protection and the relation between human rights and the environment. Specific attention was given to advocacy for national resource conservation and the fighting against environmental crime. In addition to technical co-operation, Bosnia and Herzegovina also received loans from the Council of Europe

Development Bank, which aimed at supporting young people in starting their own businesses and at providing housing for refugees and displaced persons from the 1991-1995 conflicts.

### 3. Acting for equality, diversity and respect

#### *Gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence*

Institutional capacities were strengthened to combat digital and sexual violence against women. Thanks to the Action Plan, tools were developed to ease women's access to justice thanks to a more gender-responsive mechanism. Furthermore, amendments to Brčko District's Criminal Code introduced for the first time a consent-based definition of sexual violence, in line with the Istanbul Convention.

#### *Human trafficking*

Support provided under the Action Plan strengthened the criminal justice response to trafficking, enhancing multidisciplinary co-operation and investigations across institutions. Victim protection before, during and after proceedings was enhanced, including through a specialised network providing free legal aid. At the legislative and policy level, the support provided led to the adoption of a new Anti-Trafficking Strategy 2024-2027 by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by a related action plan in Republika Srpska.

#### *Anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion*

Following dedicated assistance, Bosnia and Herzegovina opened its first shelter for LGBTI victims of domestic violence in 2024 with the involvement of local civil society organisations. In addition, Sarajevo's fourth and fifth Pride Marches were held successfully, with no recorded violence or harassment. Local authorities continued to improve Roma integration through the implementation of the National Action Plan for Roma Social Inclusion 2021-2025, and, with the Council of Europe's support, civil servants bolstered their capacities in hate speech recognition and response. Bosnia and Herzegovina's main religious communities actively engaged in dialogue on their role in preventing hate speech, with 26 imams being empowered to act as multipliers of tolerance in their respective communities.



### 4. Building trust in public institutions

#### *Independence and efficiency of justice*

The Action Plan enhanced the quality and reliability of judicial statistics through continued capacity-building on tools and methodology of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), with Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming a regional reference for data-driven objective case management. Five pilot courts enhanced accountability and fostered transparency with the media and the public thanks to the development of comprehensive communication strategies. Moreover, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina started elaborating a new draft law on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (pending adoption), proactively seeking the legal advice of the Venice Commission.



### **Prisons, police, deprivation of liberty**



Expanded capacity-building across detention settings resulted in a more harmonised human rights approach to persons deprived of liberty. With the Action Plan support, unified tools specific to violent and extremist prisoners (VEPs) were adopted and successfully applied. Prison staff enhanced their skills on assessing radicalisation and supporting reintegration back into society. The collection, analysis and sharing of information between prisons and other relevant agencies was improved, as well as the electronic processing of prisoners' data.

## **5. Upholding safety, security and integrity of society and persons**



### **Fight against corruption and money laundering**

Legal and policy advice provided under the Action Plan allowed for major breakthroughs in 2024, ultimately leading to the adoption of the state-level Law on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest and the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing. At the same time, relevant institutions and authorities, as well as the private sector, enhanced their capacities to tackle money laundering more effectively, thereby already operationalising the recently adopted legislation. The Action Plan also contributed to the alignment of the legal framework for political party financing with international standards and GRECO recommendations.



### **Cybercrime**

Support provided under the Action Plan bolstered interagency co-operation to search, seize and confiscate cybercrime proceeds and to conduct parallel financial investigations, also encouraging information sharing between public and private sectors. Criminal justice authorities further strengthened their investigative skills in virtual assets, cryptocurrencies, advanced financial forensics of online fraud and online child sexual exploitation and abuse, increasingly engaging in international co-operation. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions approved the country's accession to the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence.

## **6. Anchoring democratic values in European societies**



### **Promoting good governance and participatory democracy at local level**

The Action Plan contributed to advancing deliberative democracy. In 2024, Banja Luka joined Mostar in setting up Citizens' Assemblies, giving people a stronger voice in local decision-making. Locally elected officials improved their skills in working together through a human rights approach and took a



more active role in building networks across municipalities and regions. In addition, a regional group of experts on deliberative democracy was created, drawing on Bosnia and Herzegovina's leading role in this sector across South-East Europe.



### *Freedom of expression, freedom of the media, safety of journalists*

The Action Plan strengthened the ability of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees to lead open and inclusive law-making, and to report on key issues such as freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom and media literacy. Prosecutors and police officers took on new roles as contact points for protecting journalists, while legal professionals and civil servants deepened their knowledge on topics such as hate speech, the protection of whistle-blowers and Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs). At the institutional level, the Communications Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina was supported through a mapping of key stakeholder, providing the institution with a tool to develop media regulations to strengthen public trust. In general, the Action Plan also continued to promote the importance of free, qualitative and safe journalism among media actors and the general public.



### *Education for democracy*



The Action Plan supported the capacities of authorities and education stakeholders to put the national “Roadmap for Improving Inclusive Education” into action. Over 700 teachers gained practical skills to promote democratic culture, constructive debate, critical thinking and community engagement in their academic facilities, in line with the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Furthermore, in 2024, the region's first-ever School Resource Centre for Advancing Democratic Culture was also opened in Kiseljak.

