



WOMEN LEAD THE WAY  
TOWARDS PEACE AND SECURITY  
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



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# 15 Years of Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in BiH:

## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The development of this publication was supported as part of the project “Women Leading the Way for Peace and Security in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” implemented with the support of the United Nations Secretary

General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in partnership with the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. The project is led by the UN Resident Coordinator in BiH and implemented jointly by UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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# 15 Years of Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in BiH:

## **LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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2025



# Acronyms

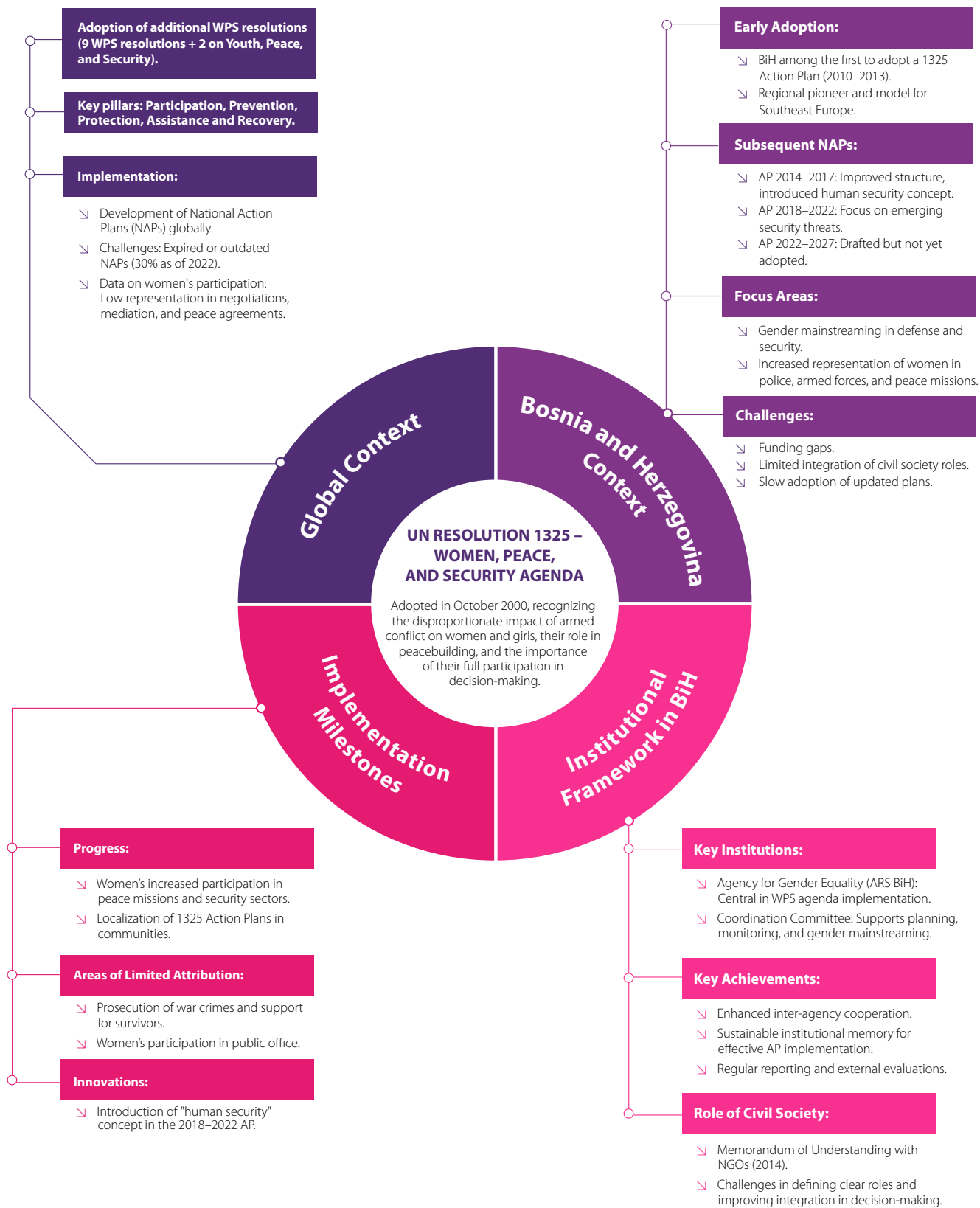
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<b>UNSCR 1325</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace, and Security
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>BiH</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>AP</b>	Action Plan
<b>AGE BiH</b>	Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>CRSV</b>	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
<b>ICTY</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>ODIHR</b>	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>HJPC</b>	High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council
<b>MoS</b>	Ministry of Security
<b>AFBiH</b>	Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>FBiH</b>	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>RS</b>	Republika Srpska
<b>BD</b>	Brčko District
<b>CAT</b>	Committee Against Torture
<b>LAP</b>	Local Action Plan
<b>GREVIO</b>	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

# Contents

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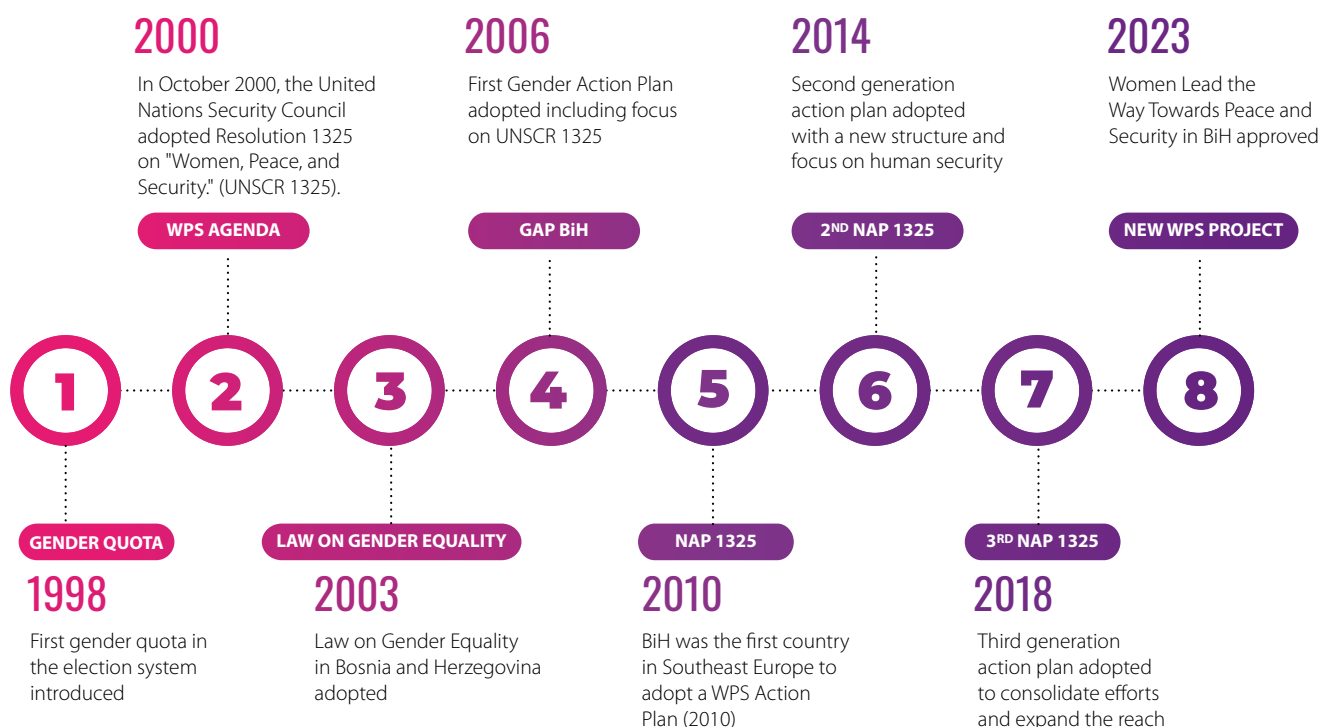
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>KEY ACHIEVEMENTS</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>CHALLENGES</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WPS AGENDA IN BIH</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1 Prevention</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3 Protection</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>2.4 Relief and recovery</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>3. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE: Pertaining human security challenges in BiH:</b> <b>WPS Agenda, Security Sector and the Human Security Concept</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>3.1 Personal security</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>3.2 Education &amp; human security</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>3.3 Economic security</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>3.4 Health &amp; human security</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>3.5 Environment &amp; human security</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>4. CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>30</b>



# SUMMARY

Adopted in 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 established the **Women, Peace, and Security agenda**, recognizing the disproportionate impacts of conflict on women and girls and underscoring the importance of their participation in peacebuilding. Subsequent resolutions expanded its scope, focusing on protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery as core pillars. The WPS agenda emphasizes integrating gender perspectives into security frameworks and ensuring women's roles in peacebuilding are recognized and strengthened.

Over the past 15 years, BiH has demonstrated significant progress in implementing the WPS agenda through robust policies and initiatives. However, persistent challenges continue to hinder full realization of its transformative potential. The chart below outlines some of the key developments since 1998 related to the WPS agenda.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

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## Adoption of Action Plans

- ✎ BiH was the first country in Southeast Europe to adopt a WPS Action Plan (2010).
- ✎ Successive Action Plans (2014–2017, 2018–2022) improved gender mainstreaming in security, defence, and governance sectors.
- ✎ Introduction of the human security concept in the 2014 Action Plan expanded focus to contemporary security concerns.

## Institutional Leadership

- ✎ The Agency for Gender Equality played a pivotal role in coordinating and implementing WPS initiatives.
- ✎ Increased women's participation in peacekeeping missions and strengthened gender capacities in defence and security institutions.

## Civil Society Engagement

- ✎ Collaboration between government and civil society organizations was fostered, with CSOs providing essential services for survivors of violence and marginalized groups.

## Gender Quotas and Participation

- ✎ BiH's Election Law mandates 40% gender representation on candidate lists.
- ✎ Women now constitute 27% of elected representatives.

## Focus on Human Security

- ✎ Local Action Plans addressed daily security concerns of women, including gender-based violence, access to healthcare, and public safety.

# CHALLENGES

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## Underrepresentation in Leadership:

- ✎ Women's representation in executive positions remains below one-third.
- ✎ High dropout rates among women politicians due to gender-based harassment and abuse.

## Funding and Coordination:

- ✎ Limited funding and fragmented coordination across national, entity, and local levels hinder broader implementation.

## Support for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV):

- ✎ Inconsistent reparations and support mechanisms for CRSV survivors.
- ✎ Stigmatization and re-traumatization continue to limit access to services.

## Economic and Social Barriers:

- ✎ Women face significant economic insecurity, lower labour force participation, and high rates of vulnerable employment.
- ✎ Gender gaps persist in wages, business ownership, and access to childcare.

## Emerging Security Threats:

- ✎ Gender-sensitive approaches to climate change, environmental degradation, and modern security challenges are underdeveloped.

To build on its achievements and address persistent challenges, this report identifies key recommendations (including specific recommendations for each theme below) aimed at strengthening governance, increasing women's participation, enhancing support for survivors, and localizing the WPS agenda to ensure inclusive and sustainable progress.



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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- 1. Adopt a new 1325 Action Plan:** The adoption and enforcement of the 1325 NAP contribute to the overall mainstreaming of the WPS agenda and human security in the country, enabling monitoring and evaluation of efforts (Council of Ministers BiH)
- 2. Strengthen Governance and Funding:** Ensure sustainable funding for WPS initiatives and improve coordination across national, entity and local institutions. This includes enhancing the roles of parliaments and civil society organizations in monitoring and implementation. (Council of Ministers BiH, Parliamentary Assembly of BiH)
- 3. Increase Women's Participation:** Further advance affirmative action measures for women's representation in security, executive and elected public offices. Provide targeted capacity-building programmes for women in leadership roles (Council of Ministers BiH, Government of FBiH, Government of RS)
- 4. Enhance Support for CRSV Survivors:** Establish a reparations mechanism based on the principle of subsidiarity, expand access to psychological and legal support, and actively combat stigmatization through awareness campaigns (Government of FBiH, Government of RS)
- 5. Localize the WPS Agenda:** Integrate the WPS agenda into local gender action plans/actions addressing community-specific needs, with a focus on marginalized groups and rural areas (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- 6. Promote Human Security:** Integrate the concept of human security into national and local frameworks, emphasizing comprehensive responses to safety, health, economic, and environmental challenges (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH)
- 7. Expand Data and Monitoring:** Establish gender-sensitive indicators and regularly publish disaggregated data to measure progress and identify gaps in implementation (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH).

# 1. INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

In October 2000, the **United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace, and Security”**. The adoption of this resolution followed the tireless efforts of women’s nongovernmental organizations supported by various UN bodies<sup>1</sup>, who advocated for the Security Council to recognize and address the impact of 1990s conflicts and effects of the “changing nature of conflict”<sup>2</sup> on women and girls.

UNSCR 1325 is a landmark resolution that recognizes the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the important role women play in the prevention and the resolution of conflicts, and their involvement in peacebuilding. It emphasizes the significance of women’s participation and full involvement in all stages of decision-making processes. Additional resolutions have further deepened the Women, Peace, and Security agenda (outlined in the text box to the left). The adoption of UNSCR 1325 was followed by nine additional WPS Resolutions and two Youth, Peace, and Security Resolutions aimed at strengthening the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and addressing emerging security threats faced by women and youth during and after conflict. **Together, these resolutions form the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.**

The Resolution contains eighteen provisions that are grouped into **four pillars: participation and representation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery**. Gender mainstreaming has continued to be reinforced in subsequent WPS Resolutions, leading to significant worldwide implementation achievements in political and security sectors over the past 25 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325.

The implementation of the WPS agenda has made significant strides, including the development of 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) and plans within international and regional organizations such as EU<sup>3</sup>, OSCE<sup>4</sup>, and NATO<sup>5</sup>.

To support the implementation on national level, a total of 109 (56%) UN Member States have developed their own UNSCR 1325 NAPs<sup>6</sup> translating commitments into concrete actions. The majority of Global North countries have developed NAPs that focus on military pre-deployment training and increasing the number of women in the defence and

## Resolution 1820 (2008)

- › The first resolution to recognize sexual violence as a tactic of war
- › Highlights the importance of strengthening efforts to implement a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation in UN peacekeeping operations
- › Urges the Secretary-General to invite women to participate in discussions related to the prevention and resolution of conflict.

## Resolution 1889 (2009)

- › Focuses on the effective participation of women in all stages of peace processes, emphasizing women’s empowerment in peacebuilding
- › Recognizes the particular needs of women and girls in post-conflict situations
- › Points out the tendency to consider women solely as victims, stressing the need to recognize women as active agents.

## Resolution 1960 (2010)

- › Provides measures aimed at ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for sexual violence.

## Resolution 2106 (2013)

- › The first resolution to recognize men and boys as targets of sexual violence
- › Addresses the significance of women’s political, social, and economic empowerment and gender equality

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (2000). Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century. Five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +5): Overview, decisions and actions.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union. (2019). EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019–2024).

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2004). Action plan for the promotion of gender equality.

<sup>5</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2021). Action Plan for the implementation of the NATO/EAPC Policy on Women, Peace and Security (2021–2025).

<sup>6</sup> Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. (n.d.). Monitoring and Analysis on WPS NAPs.

security sector, particularly in peace-keeping operations. Countries that have experienced conflict have developed their NAPs in a much broader format, often using them to improve gender mainstreaming across their system. In these countries, National Action Plans have aimed to establish sustainable systems for protecting women in conflict and post-conflict situations. This has included increasing the number of women in military and police forces, as well as ensuring the punishment of all individuals involved in crimes against women.

Around 30% of NAPs are currently not updated, having expired in 2022 or earlier<sup>7</sup>, indicating that momentum to implement UNSCR 1325 has slowed. This concern was also noted by the UN Secretary-General, who stated: “Amid record levels of armed conflict and violence, progress made over decades is vanishing before our eyes.”<sup>8</sup> Initial new global data collected by UN Women through the Women in Peace Processes Monitor shows a lack of overall progress in ensuring women’s full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace processes and that *“women made up only 9.6 per cent of negotiators, 13.7 per cent of mediators and 26.6 per cent of signatories to peace agreements and ceasefire agreements.”*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> United Nations. (2024). Secretary-General’s Women, Peace, and Security Report.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WPS AGENDA IN BIH

**BiH was among the first countries to adopt a specific policy to implement the UNSCR 1325 although actions related to the implementation of the Resolution were initially included in the Gender Action Plan starting in 2006.** The first Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in BiH (AP UNSCR 1325 in BiH) for 2010-2013<sup>9</sup> was the first of its kind in Southeast Europe and served as a model for other countries in the region in drafting their national action plans. The second and third Action Plans were adopted in 2014<sup>10</sup> and 2018, respectively. The fourth Action Plan 2022-2027 was developed but not yet adopted by the Council of Ministers.

### AGE BIH as a driving force behind the WPS agenda

The Agency for Gender Equality has been a critical actor in implementing the AP 1325. AGE BiH supported the work of the 1325 Coordination Board, a key mechanism that mobilizes institutions and supports gender mainstreaming across defence, security, and governance sectors. The Board's success lies in its inter-agency collaboration and sustained institutional memory, ensuring effective planning, monitoring, and implementation of the AP. AGE BiH's leadership has made it a regional and international model for advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Although participation was prioritized in all versions of the AP, the plans have consistently supported women's involvement in peacebuilding, reflecting BiH's post-conflict and transitional context. Unlike similar plans in the region, BiH's Action Plan **explicitly addressed the legacy of conflict and remains unique as the only policy regularly adopted at the national level with "peace and security" in its title.** This highlights the ongoing focus on addressing the legacies of war and the rights of survivors.

As policy documents, the Action Plans have evolved and improved with each iteration. Their structure, formulation of outcomes, outputs, and activities has become more streamlined. Overall coordination and monitoring of the Action Plan has been managed by the Coordination Board for the implementation of the AP 1325, with significant support from AGE BiH, including attracting funds from international donors.

In the context of the country, the AP is one of the rare policies that is regularly reported on and was subject to external evaluations. Data presented in this report provide valuable insights into the impact of WPS institutional efforts.

AP UNSCR 1325 2010–2013	AP UNSCR 1325 2014–2017	AP UNSCR 1325 2018–2022
Duration 3 years	Duration 3 years	Duration 5 years
8 goals	3 goals	3 goals
Focus on participation	More efficient structure based on resolution, focus on participation	More efficient structure based on resolution, focus on participation
49 activities	16 groups of activities	16 groups of activities
Lack of funds for enforcement	Adopted M&E plan	No activity for RS11
CSO representative included	Coordinating Committee with 19 institutions	Introduced focus on new security threats
	The concept of human security was introduced	
	CSO advisory group	

<sup>9</sup> Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 92/10.

<sup>10</sup> Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 89/14.

<sup>11</sup> The Kils from Republika Srpska interviewed for the Baseline explained that WPS related activities in RS are implemented under the framework of the Gender action plan of BiH

**A number of important milestones can be directly attributed to the implementation of the AP.** These include activities focused on increasing the participation of women in the police, armed forces, and peacekeeping missions, as well as the development of measures aimed at hiring, promoting, and retaining female members in these and other services.

However, there are several areas of the AP where progress cannot be easily attributed to its implementation or where activities have been carried out outside the framework of this policy. These include activities related to women's participation in public office, the prosecution of perpetrators, and support for survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV). Although some progress in these areas can be noted during the implementation of the three Action Plans, this progress cannot be directly attributed to the AP. The introduction of the human security concept in the 2018 UNSCR 1325 NAP has allowed for the translation of the UNSCR 1325 provisions to address contemporary security concerns in BiH. It has also enabled the localization of the UNSCR 1325 APs in several local communities throughout BiH.<sup>12</sup>

### Engaging Civil Society in the 1325 Action Plan: Progress and Challenges

The implementation of the 1325 AP has fostered collaboration between government institutions and civil society organizations. While the first Action Plan included the participation of a single CSO member, the second Action Plan expanded this framework significantly. In 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Coordination Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the Action Plan and 13 non-governmental organizations. However, challenges remain since the precise role of CSOs under the Memorandum is not clearly defined and there is a need for deeper integration of CSOs in decision-making structures to enhance the effectiveness of the 1325 Action Plan.

## 2.1 Prevention<sup>13</sup>

### Recommendations

- Ensure that activities related to the implementation of Resolution 1325 address mechanisms for reparations, reconciliation, and memorialization, ensuring compliance with Resolution 1325 (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- Ensure the participation of women in all reforms, particularly in those related to the constitution and EU and NATO integration (Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Establish and operationalize accountability and disciplinary mechanisms in the security sector to enforce zero tolerance for any form of abuse, bullying, harassment, or discrimination, including sexual exploitation and abuse
- Expand and align local gender action plans with the WPS agenda, incorporating the issue of human security (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- Improve cooperation between governments and CSOs with a focus on ensuring sustainable peace in the context of gender equality (Coordination Committee of AP 1325)

The prevention pillar of the UNSCR 1325 emphasizes the need to prevent conflict, and violence against women, while promoting gender equality and women's participation in peace and security processes. The Armed Forces and security institutions of BiH have been notably proactive in implementing the prevention pillar of UNSCR 1325 through their training and educational programs. This is particularly evident in the peacekeeping pre-deployment training offered by the BiH AF

<sup>12</sup> Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2020). Localization of UNSCR 1325 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Retrieved from [https://arsbjh.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Localization-1325\\_BiH.pdf](https://arsbjh.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Localization-1325_BiH.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> CONFLICT PREVENTION: Incorporation of a gender perspective and the participation of women in preventing the emergence, spread, and re-emergence of violent conflict as well as addressing root causes including the need for disarmament. Address the continuum of violence and to adopt a holistic perspective of peace based on equality, human rights and human security for all, including the most marginalized, applied both domestically and internationally.

Peace Support Operations Training Centre, which trains both military and police personnel.

The process of transitional justice in BiH began immediately after the conflict, focusing on promoting accountability, reconciliation, and healing within a society deeply affected by the war. Trials led by the ICTY and BiH courts resulted in a number of cases prosecuted. However, a decision to establish a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in BiH or to adopt a Transitional Justice Strategy has not been made. The majority these efforts have been initiated by CSOs, which continue to work with youth and women's groups on memorialization, commemoration, reparation for victims, and restorative justice<sup>14</sup>.

### BiH peace missions contribute to the global WPS prevention efforts

The **Peace Support Operations Training Centre of BiH** is a NATO and UN accredited training centre for peace support operation personnel. The centre provides the Utility of Gender in Peace Support Operations course as a vital training platform to enhance the understanding and application of gender perspectives in peacekeeping and security operations. This course focuses on gender quality and the role gender mainstreaming plays in achieving sustainable peace and operational effectiveness. It also addresses the importance of understanding women's roles as key societal actors and the need to combat conflict-related sexual violence. The course prepares participants to implement gender perspectives in diverse functional areas, ensuring that peace support forces operate with inclusivity and heightened awareness in the societies they aim to protect, thereby fostering a more comprehensive approach to peacebuilding.

## 2.2 Participation<sup>15</sup>

### Recommendations

- ↘ Reassess the approach to participation in light of the new CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, setting gender parity as mid-term policy goal (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, Central Election Commission)
- ↘ Adopt and regularly monitor targets to increase the number of women in leadership roles - with parity as the goal - in politics, peacekeeping, security sector, peacebuilding and humanitarian/refugee planning and coordination entities (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, Agency for Statistics of BiH)
- ↘ Introduce temporary special measures (e.g., quotas, incentives) to facilitate gradual increase in women's representation in government and executive positions on the state, entity, and cantonal levels (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ↘ Advocate with all peace process actors to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in key decision-making process including in EU and NATO integrations and constitutional reforms (Agency for Gender Equality BiH)
- ↘ Support leadership development programs for men in public office to enhance their capacity and interest to advocating for women's rights and broader gender equality objectives
- ↘ Support political parties in developing party policies to address all forms of gender-based discrimination and in creating gender-responsive party programmes (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, Central Election Commission)
- ↘ Consider amending existing rules on financing political parties from public funds to expand financing of political parties that promote gender equality through statutory bodies for women and/or have a gender action plan (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, Central Election Commission)

<sup>14</sup> BiH Ministry of Justice. (n.d.). [Transitional Justice Guide](#).

<sup>15</sup> PARTICIPATION: Full and equal participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making, including peace-processes, electoral processes (both candidates and voters), UN positions, and the broader social-political sphere

The absence of women in decision-making roles, despite the existence of legal quotas, undermines both gender equality and human security. Excluding women from these positions disregards their perspectives and needs, resulting in policies that may overlook their rights and perpetuate inequalities.

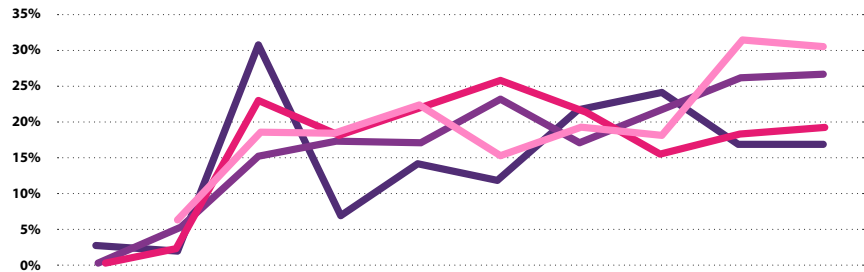
In BiH, legislation promoting gender equality establishes a threshold of 40% for women's participation in leadership roles. However, women's actual representation in legislative and executive positions remains low. A temporary special measure was

### Advancing Gender Quotas in Electoral Legislation in BiH

BiH's Election Law, adopted in 1998, introduced a mandatory gender quota for candidate lists, requiring 40% representation of the minority gender with a rank-order rule. This ensures women are evenly distributed across candidate lists, significantly impacting their participation in politics. The Central Election Commission enforces compliance by rejecting non-conforming lists. However, the quota's impact has fluctuated over time, influenced by other factors.

introduced in the **BiH Election Law**<sup>16</sup>, mandating all political parties to include at least 40% of women politicians in the election lists. The **Law on Financing of Political Parties** mandates that 10 percent of the political parties' funding is allocated to parties which have women elected in the BiH PA. Similar measure does not exist for other parliaments in the country. **The new CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems calls for gender parity (50/50), a paradigm shift which will require further reforms in BiH.**

**Women made 27% of all elected persons in the 2022 General Elections**<sup>17</sup> with an increase from 19.6% to 22.8% of women elected in the 2024 Local Elections. Share of women mayors has been consistently low including in local government councils.



	1990	1996	1998	2000	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
House of Representatives - Parliamentary Assembly of BiH	2,90%	2,30%	30,20%	7,20%	14,30%	11,90%	21,40%	23,80%	16,60%	16,70%
House of Representatives - Parliament of FBiH	0,00%	5,00%	14,95%	14,95%	16,90%	23,00%	17,35%	21,40%	26,00%	26,50%
National Assembly of RS	0,00%	2,40%	22,90%	22,90%	21,40%	25,50%	21,68%	15,60%	18,00%	19,30%
Cantonal assemblies		6,40%	18,46%	18,46%	22%	15%	19%	18%	31%	30%

16 Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2001). Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 23/01 and subsequent amendments.

17 Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2023). Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**There are no temporary specific measures for women in the executive and participation of women does not exceed one third of posts in any of the current governments.**

Women politicians face persistent gendered abuse, including accusations of emulating male behaviours, body shaming, and smear campaigns involving sexual insinuations<sup>18</sup>, creating a hostile political culture that discourages their sustained participation and contributes to high dropout rates after a single election or mandate. In its report following the 2022 General Elections, the ODIHR highlighted unequal access of women candidates to speaking time at party events and in the media - a finding corroborated by several other studies. The 2024 amendments to the Electoral Law, among many things, addressed this disparity by urging political parties to ensure equal promotion of candidates of both genders during media appearances, public gatherings, and other forms of election campaigning. The amendments also included penalties for hate speech.

In most parliamentary political parties, **internal party structures for women** are common but often lack earmarked funding and a clear mandate. While several political parties have been supported in conducting gender audits and developing gender action plans based on the ODIHR methodology<sup>19</sup>, data on the impact of these efforts remains unavailable. Despite the increased participation of women in decision-making positions, constitutional reform meetings are predominantly conducted by political party leaders, frequently excluding the general public and women. Additionally, persons with disabilities and members of national minorities are generally excluded from these processes.

The **participation of women in the judiciary** is higher than in other sectors, both vertically and horizontally which may be attributed to the application of temporary special measures in the recruitment of judges and prosecutors. Women make 60.92% of judges and prosecutors and hold 49.61% of leadership positions. Additionally, women make up to 60% of the members of the HJPC.

While the share of women in the police, armed forces, and in peace missions is increasing, it remains insufficient to establish a solid foundation for their advancement to leadership roles. These institutions continue to receive a low number of applications from women for higher ranking posts<sup>20</sup>.

**In police agencies**, women made 7.95% of police personnel in 2021<sup>21</sup> at all levels of government in BiH, a slight decrease (1%) compared to previous years. Directors and deputy directors of all seven administrative units under the Ministry of Security (MoS) are men.<sup>22</sup> All 16 police directors/commissioners on state, entity, and cantonal levels are men. Participation of **female police officers in peacekeeping missions is high (30-35%)** which can be attributed to the rule which has lowered the years of experience for women from 7 to 5 years.

**In the defence sector**, the latest available data indicates that women make up 44.7% of the total personnel in the Ministry of Defence and 8.53% of military and civilian personnel of the AFBiH. The MoD has implemented activities to promote the defence sector for both men and women. These measures include rules requiring that at least one candidate of each gender be

### Women Police Officers Associations empowering women in the security sector

The "Policewomen's Network" and the "Network of Women of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska (RS WPON)" are pivotal in advancing gender equality in BiH's police forces. These associations focus on empowering female officers through capacity building, combating workplace harassment, and advocating for policies to prevent discrimination. They actively support the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 by working to increase women's representation in policing, especially in leadership roles, and raising awareness of gender-based discrimination. Operating as non-governmental organizations, they unite women from 16 institutions to enhance their professional and leadership skills. Despite progress, including appointing focal points for gender equality, many measures remain unimplemented, underscoring the need for stronger engagement and concrete actions to fully realize their goals.

18 Sokol, A., & Sarajlić, D. (Eds.). (2023). Harmful narratives during elections: Smear campaigns, gender stereotypes and hate narratives - 2022 General Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Miftari, E. (2019). Violence Against Women in Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

19 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2024). Transforming political parties from within: Gender audits and action plans – Tool 2. Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/odihr/574334>

20 Đipa, A., & Škaljo, D. (2021). Evaluation of the Action Plan for Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in BiH (2018–2022).

21 1325 AP Report 2021, no subsequent reports exist

22 Ombudsperson. (2024). Annual Report for 2023.



shortlisted for a vacancy, and if two candidates score the same number of points against the selection criteria, preference is given to the candidate from the less represented gender. As a result, the number of applications from qualified women increased by 20% in 2019 alone. However, this increase in women's admissions has yet to translate into significant advancements to higher military ranks, where women currently account for only 3,1% of personnel.

## 2.3 Protection<sup>23</sup>

### Recommendations

- ✎ Advance the alignment of the national policy and legal framework with the Istanbul Convention to address all forms of violence against women including domestic violence (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ✎ Develop and implement a reparations mechanism for victims of all forms of gender-based violence, including CRSV to ensure access to adequate, effective, and prompt reparations, as recommended by the UN CAT and CEDAW (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy FBiH, Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Protection RS)
- ✎ Amend entity-level laws on civilian victims of war to expand the scope of recognized survivors, streamline application processes, and address barriers such as stigmatization and re-traumatization
- ✎ Develop specialized training programs for healthcare providers, legal professionals, and social workers to improve their capacity to support survivors in a sensitive and effective manner (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy FBiH, Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Protection RS)
- ✎ Explicitly incorporate CRSV response measures into the Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, ensuring alignment with international standards and obligations (Agency for Gender Equality BiH)
- ✎ Establish a dedicated working group under the Coordination Board for UNSCR 1325 that includes relevant government institutions, NGOs, and survivor representatives to focus on CRSV issues (Agency for Gender Equality BiH)
- ✎ Utilize BiH's EU integration process to advocate for stronger mechanisms addressing CRSV, including conditionality on progress in this area. (Directorate for EU Integrations, Agency for Gender Equality BiH)

Overall, **64% of women in BiH** can be considered directly affected by conflict, having lived through the conflict and experienced at least one conflict-related incident. While the exact number of individuals subjected to CRSV remains unknown, estimates suggest that around 20,000 women and men were affected. Support services for victims of CRSV, including safe houses, were by CSOs during the conflict. However, most of the efforts related to CSRV protection have happened outside the scope of the AP 1325. The Coordination Board did not include institutions directly responsible for providing support to survivors of CRSV and there is no evidence that any of these activities can be attributed to the AP.

<sup>23</sup> PROTECTION: Specific protection rights and needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings, including reporting and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence; domestic implementation of regional and international laws and con

CRSV victims face stigmatization, inability to obtain required medical findings, especially for the CRSV survivors, and re-traumatization, which are some of the challenges that prevent the victims from obtaining their social protection rights.<sup>24</sup>

The ICTY trials have resulted in 32 individuals convicted for directly committing crimes of wartime sexual violence, while 4 others were additionally convicted for failing to prevent the crime and punish the direct perpetrators. Data on the number of cases pending before the courts in BiH is not known, and OSCE data from 2016 shows that in the period from 2004 to 2016, in proceedings before BiH, in the courts, 123 perpetrators were convicted of wartime sexual violence.<sup>25</sup>

Elements of reparations exist in BiH, but there is an impression that the approach is not systematic and does not provide the same rights to the same groups of victims. Segments of the right to reparations are most often regulated by laws addressing social protection, healthcare, education, as well as numerous by-laws and acts governing various compensations allocated from public budgets. Only a small percent of approximately 1000 survivors of wartime sexual violence received some form of reparations. These survivors emphasize the pressing need for additional psychological, healthcare, and legal support. A significant number of individuals who have suffered non-material damages as victims of war crimes have opted to seek compensation through regular courts by filing lawsuits within civil proceedings. Both the UN CAT<sup>26</sup> and UN CEDAW found BiH in violation for failing to provide adequate, effective, and prompt reparations for victims of CRSV including for the absence of a national reparation mechanism.

The UN Committee Against Torture has repeatedly called on BiH to ensure that victims of torture and abuse, including victims of wartime sexual violence, can exercise their right to reparations including financial compensation, public apology, and the establishment of a state-level reparations mechanism.

### A comprehensive reparation mechanism

In 2019, the UN CAT issued a landmark decision against BiH for failing to provide adequate reparations to a survivor of wartime sexual violence. The decision highlighted BiH's obligation to ensure effective remedies, including compensation, medical and psychological support, and public acknowledgment of the survivor's suffering. It emphasized the state's duty to combat stigma and protect survivors from re-traumatization. This decision underscores the urgent need for BiH to establish a comprehensive reparations mechanism in line with international standards.

## 2.4 Relief and recovery<sup>27</sup>

### Recommendations

- Ensure that all relief and recovery programs explicitly address the unique needs and challenges faced by women, particularly in post-conflict settings. (Agency for Gender Equality BiH)
- Develop specific frameworks within LAPs to incorporate relief efforts tailored to the conflict/post-conflict period, addressing gaps in current strategies (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- Increase financial and institutional support for Women's CSOs that have played a central role in providing shelters, aid, and reintegration services (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)

<sup>24</sup> Trial International. (2024). Challenges and implementation of the RS Law on protection of victims of wartime torture.

<sup>25</sup> OSCE Mission to BiH, 'Achieving Justice for Victims of Sexual Violence in the Armed Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Progress Made Before the Courts in BiH from 2014 to 2016' (2017)

<sup>26</sup> Mrs A v Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 August 2019) Communication No. 854/2017 CAT/C/67/D/854/2017; SH v Bosnia and Herzegovina (9 July 2020) Communication No. 116/2017 CEDAW/C/76/D/116/2017.

<sup>27</sup> RELIEF AND RECOVERY: Access to health services and trauma counseling, including for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence

- Facilitate partnerships between local government bodies, international organizations, and women's CSOs to enhance the reach and sustainability of recovery initiatives (local government units)
- Conduct public awareness campaigns aimed at shifting traditionalist societal attitudes toward gender roles, promoting trust, tolerance, and inclusivity in recovery processes (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)

The relief and recovery pillar of UNSCR 1325 focuses on ensuring that women's needs and perspectives are fully integrated into humanitarian responses and recovery efforts in post-conflict settings. This pillar emphasizes the critical role women play in rebuilding their communities and addresses the specific challenges they face during and after armed conflict.

Women's CSOs and some international organizations have carried the biggest burden of the relief and recovery in the aftermath of the conflict in BiH, through provision of immediate shelters and basic aid services, as well as development of programs for reintegration and economic empowerment of refugee and displaced population.

BiH is culturally closer to traditionalist societies<sup>28</sup> that "treasure the nuclear family (father, mother, children), religion, and patriotism," as well as survival societies "generally characterized by low levels of trust, intolerance toward out-groups, and low support for gender equality."

In the context of the AP 1325, the AGE BiH has worked with local government and civil society actors to develop LAPs in six pilot municipalities. These LAPs addressed women's daily security concerns; these include protection from gender-based violence and human trafficking, access to legal protection, education, healthcare, natural and economic resources, as well as implications of environmental and infrastructure concerns such as recent floods, landmines, street lighting, and public transportation. However, it should be noted that relief was not particularly highlighted in these action plans. There were clear overlaps with overall approach to gender mainstreaming without clear references to the conflict/post-conflict period. At the same time, other actors, primarily the entity Gender Centres, have worked on localization of the GAP BiH with efforts which focused on the same issues.

#### Local Gender Action Plans: Advancing Personal Security

In BiH, Local Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security (LAPs) address women's security concerns, including gender-based violence, human trafficking, healthcare, education, and public safety. Developed by the Agency for Gender Equality with local governments and civil society, these plans bring UNSCR 1325 to life in communities. Sustainable security, however, needs women actively shaping decisions, especially from marginalized groups. Civil society empowers women to claim rights, combat violence, and engage publicly. As one organization highlights, "We focus on peacebuilding, reconciliation, and violence prevention, empowering women economically and socially." LAPs prove local, inclusive solutions can transform security and inspire lasting societal change.

28 Halman, L., Reeskens, T., Sieben, I., & van Zundert, M. (2022). Atlas of European Values: Change and Continuity in Turbulent Times. Open Press Tilburg University. [https://doi.org/10.26116/6P8V-TT12\\_p.37](https://doi.org/10.26116/6P8V-TT12_p.37).

### 3. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE:

## Pertaining human security challenges in BiH: WPS Agenda, Security Sector and the Human Security Concept

Security has historically been defined narrowly in terms of external and internal state security. However, the contemporary understanding of security is broader, emphasizing the security needs of individuals as a central focus<sup>29</sup>. **This shift is encapsulated in the concept of “human security,” which was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 66/290 in 2012.**<sup>30</sup>

Gender-sensitive implementation of human security, particularly in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, can improve the lives of women and girls by ensuring access to resources and opportunities, securing agency and empowerment, and protecting human rights. The lack of understanding of the differences between men and women’s security needs has resulted in women’s exclusion from decision making and in the neglect of their needs and priorities in peace building and reconstruction efforts.

The human security approach offers a broader lens, emphasizing the importance of safety, dignity, and empowerment for individuals. It advocates for a multi-layered analysis that captures the complex interplay of factors contributing to women’s vulnerabilities in BiH. By focusing on human security, this research aligns with a paradigm that prioritizes the well-being of individuals and communities, advocating for strategies that are inclusive, people-centered, and preventive in nature.

There is no common understanding of the concept of human security in BiH with significant variations in how different stakeholders interpret the term. While the term “human security” resonates across sectors, its meaning is highly dependent on the perspective of the stakeholder or institution. Organizations like NATO emphasize specific operational priorities, such as civilian protection and combating trafficking, while the UNDP adopts a broader, rights-based framework focused on freedom from fear, want, and poverty.

This lack of a unified understanding suggests that the concept serves more as a flexible framework than a universally agreed-upon doctrine. A shared commitment to protecting individuals from diverse threats exists, but interpretations and priorities vary significantly. This approach has resulted in the fact that there are no official data on the gender dimension of human security issues in the country. Data collected in the area of security are mostly focusing on violence against women in intimate partner relations with a strong focus on domestic violence.

Based on desk research, the Baseline Study developed an inventory of indicators focusing on human security which included five dimensions: personal insecurity, education insecurity, economic insecurity, health insecurity, and environmental insecurity<sup>31</sup>. The registry was used to collect various data sets, with the goal to identifying and assessing both immediate and structural threats to human security of women.

The General Assembly resolution 66/290 defined that “Human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” It calls for “people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.”

AP 1325 defines the concept of human security as “Protecting people from the everyday security threats and challenges, which also contributes to greater national security (this includes more actors and the wider community)”.

<sup>29</sup> UN Women/DCAF/ODIHR 2016: *Gender and Security Toolkit 1*

<sup>30</sup> UN General Assembly 2012: *Resolution 66/290*

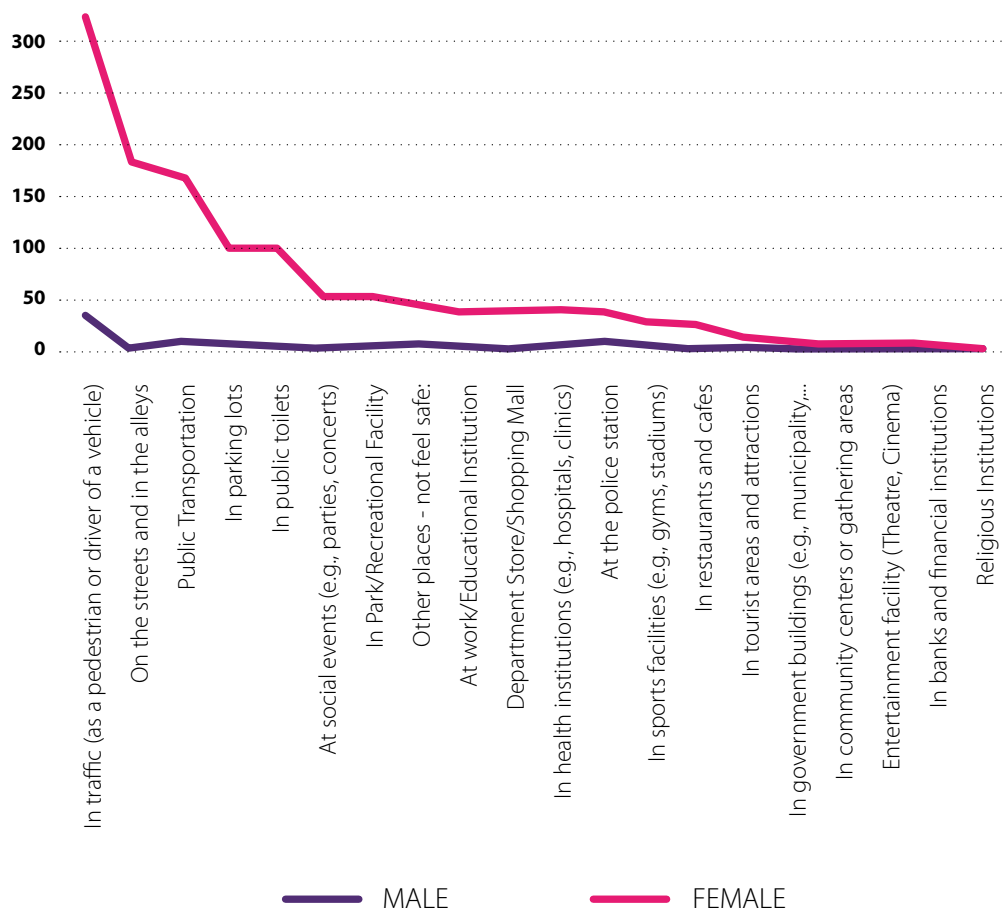
<sup>31</sup> Based on the definition provided by: United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *New Dimensions of Human Security*. Human Development Report.



### 3.1 Personal security

#### Recommendations

- ✎ Advocate for the implementation of enforcement mechanisms to combat GBV, including stalking, harassment, and non-consensual distribution of images (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ✎ Promote community policing initiatives to improve relationships between law enforcement and communities, emphasizing safety concerns specific to women (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ✎ Conduct regular, gender-sensitive surveys to collect detailed data on personal security concerns, experiences, and perceptions, including urban and rural disparities and public transport safety (ministries in the field of transport)
- ✎ Require public transportation providers to implement gender-sensitive safety measures, including staff training, installation of panic buttons, and the presence of visible security personnel (ministries in the field of transport)
- ✎ Launch public awareness campaigns that address GBV, harassment, and aggressive behaviours in public spaces, promoting societal norms that encourage equality and respect (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ✎ Advocate for education programmes in schools, universities, and workplaces to address gender-based discrimination, encourage reporting by the community, and foster a culture of accountability (Agency for Gender Equality BiH, Gender Centre FBiH, Gender Centre RS)
- ✎ Ensure that urban planning processes integrate gender perspectives by consulting women and marginalized groups to identify safety concerns and priorities (ministries responsible for spatial planning)



Personal security refers to the state of being safe from danger or harm. It is the protection of oneself and one's property from threats such as theft, violence, including online attacks.

Studies have found clear links between the concern around personal safety in constraining women's access to and use of public space. Data on personal insecurities in public space for women in BiH is not available. Previous research has found that women in BiH feel generally safe and that women feel the least safe in Sarajevo, and the most in Banja Luka. A survey on the public transport in Sarajevo found that 75.6 per cent of women responded that they do not feel safe on public transportation.

Women report significantly heightened concerns about public and private safety particularly unsafe in traffic, on public transportation, and in secluded areas such as parking lots and public toilets. This heightened sense of insecurity often relates to fears of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, and rape.

The semantic analysis of the open question related to experience with unwanted behaviours in public revealed situations of experience with past violence. Several respondents report being harassed or discriminated against in their workplaces based on gender, national origin, political beliefs, or disabilities. This includes physical aggression, verbal harassment, and professional undermining. Respondents mention experiences of harassment or violence in public spaces, including streets and public transport, often based on their gender, ethnicity, or because they were alone. Aggressive driving by male drivers emerges as a gendered form of violence, reflecting societal constructs of masculinity. This behaviour poses a direct threat to public safety and perpetuates a culture of dominance and aggression.

#### Key words used to explain the feeling of insecurity

- "nesigurno" (unsafe)
- "agresivni" (aggressive)
- "neodgovorni" (irresponsible)
- "opasni" (dangerous)
- "nepažljivi" (careless)
- "nezadovoljni" (unsatisfied)
- "neprijemeri" (inappropriate)
- "nezakoniti" (illegal)

Past negative experiences with violence, harassment, or institutional failure contribute to ongoing fear and distrust in law enforcement and judicial systems. Women's open-ended responses highlight their fear of gender-based violence, lack of institutional support, and societal norms that prioritize male dominance in public spaces.

Many women report feelings of isolation due to caregiving responsibilities and financial constraints, limiting their ability to engage in social activities and contributing to their withdrawal from public life. The data highlights the role of intersecting identities—such as gender, education level, and geographical location—in shaping experiences and perceptions of violence. Women facing discrimination based on disability, political beliefs, or ethnicity often experience compounded vulnerabilities.

There are no specific policies to combat sexual harassment, as highlighted by GREVIO<sup>32</sup>. There has been some progress in the criminalization of sexual harassment in RS and BD but not in FBiH. The OSCE survey<sup>33</sup> identified domestic violence as the most prevalent form of violence, with an overwhelming

majority of women recognizing it as a community issue. The #nisamtrazila movement resulted in a number of testimonies on harassment. Gender-based violence extends into public spaces and online environments, with significant reports of sexual harassment, stalking, and aggressive behaviours, often perpetrated by men. Additionally, 28% of women have encountered sexual harassment in their adult life and every tenth woman has experience sexual violence in a single year.

### **From domestic to diverse forms of gender-based violence (a box on improvements of the national legislative and policy framework)**

BiH has significantly improved its legislative and policy framework to combat gender-based violence. Initially focused on domestic violence, reforms now need to address diverse forms such as stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, and online abuse. The Istanbul Convention, enhancing prevention, victim protection, and offender accountability needs to be at the core of these efforts.

### **Addressing SALW on national level**

BiH SALW Coordination Board, Border Police, State Investigation and Protection Agency, and the Prosecutor's Office, alongside police academies, women police associations, and NGOs. Guided by the Strategy 2024-2021, these efforts addressed legislative alignment, operational capacity-building, and public awareness to reduce the risks of SALW proliferation, creating a safer and more secure society.

32 GREVIO. (2022). GREVIO's (Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention): BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (GREVIO/Inf(2022)19). Council of Europe

33 OSCE. (2019). OSCE-led Survey on Violence Against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

## 3.2 Education & human security

### Recommendations

- ↘ Adopt measures to reduce the gap between supply and demand in preschool education by increasing the number of public kindergartens (including public-private partnerships) and improving their facilities (institutions responsible for preschool education)
- ↘ Introduce subsidies for low-income families to improve access to preschool education, ensuring equitable opportunities for all children (institutions responsible for preschool education)
- ↘ Provide mandatory training for teachers and school staff on identifying, preventing, and addressing gender-based violence and gender-based discrimination (education institutions)
- ↘ Ensure that school curricula are free from gender stereotypes and include content that promotes gender equality, women's rights, and dignity-driven education (pedagogical institutes)
- ↘ Create safe spaces within schools where students can discuss issues related to violence, discrimination, and personal challenges with trained counsellors (education institutions)

Education plays a critical role in empowering women and driving their lives towards dignity, equality, and independence. A dignity-driven approach to women's education goes beyond the mere acquisition of academic knowledge; it encompasses the development of self-esteem, the ability to make informed choices, and the empowerment to participate fully in all aspects of life—socially, economically, and politically. Thus, education is fundamental to human rights and a critical avenue for achieving gender equality and uplifting the lives of women and girls<sup>34</sup>.

The lack of sufficient preschool services increases women's vulnerability in the labour market. Preschool education suffers from a lack of availability and quality, and public kindergartens are overwhelmed by demand and hampered by poor conditions. Despite overall progress, the enrolment rate in BiH was at 25%, compared to the Western Balkans average of 53% and the EU average<sup>35</sup>.

Nearly 80 percent of Roma children live in poverty by 2019 estimates,<sup>36</sup> and shares of Roma children enrolled in pre-school education are negligible. Roma children's enrolment rates in compulsory education are increasing, although drop-out of Roma children is still exceptionally high (18 percent of Roma girls to 27 percent of boys).<sup>37</sup>

There are no significant differences between participation of female and male students in primary and secondary education. However, disparities are evident in vocational schools, where about 75% students are male. Gender stereotypes in educational choices contribute to maintaining existing occupational segregation. Women constitute the majority of graduate and postgraduate students (over 63% in average) but are predominantly represented in fields such as health and social protection, education, and social sciences. They also make up nearly half of doctoral graduates. Harmful gender stereotypes can still be found in textbooks, and a comprehensive approach to this issue remains absent. Systematic and continuous education on gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights is not yet available. Only some primary schools introduced the elective courses to promote changes in awareness, thinking, habits, and the adoption of healthy lifestyles among young people.

34 Hicks, D. (n.d.). Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Conflict Resolution and Leading with Dignity: How to Create a Culture That Brings Out the Best in People. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3J6UZS9](https://bit.ly/3J6UZS9)

35 OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Bosnia and Herzegovina © OECD 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a669e5f3-en>

36 UNICEF. (2023). Prioritizing Children: The Case for Investment in Early Childhood Development—Republika Srpska. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/9546/file/Investment%20Case%20for%20Children%20in%20Republika%20Srpska%20.pdf>

37 ECRI. (2024). ECRI Report on BiH (sixth monitoring cycle)

### Experience with insecurities in education

"Verbal violence, for example, based on religion, as well as based on physical appearance, besides verbal violence, photographing in school, during physical education classes, spreading those pictures around the city, and mocking."  
"During classes, I received comments from other students regarding my nationality: "...all you Serbs should be slaughtered..." and similar content."



Peer violence is prevalent, often rooted in classist, gender, religious, or nationalist prejudices. This further exacerbates the challenges faced by boys and girls in the educational system. Survey data highlights that 32.29% of women report experiencing gender-based differential treatment in schools, with 18.72% stating that it occurs frequently. In some primary schools, the elective course Healthy Lifestyles was introduced in the reporting period with the aim of influencing the change in awareness, way of thinking, life habits and the introduction of healthy lifestyles among young people.

### 3.3 Economic security

#### Recommendations

- ✎ Expand and improve active labour market policies to include tailored programs that address the specific needs of women, particularly marginalized groups such as single mothers/parents, Roma women, and women with disabilities (employment bureaus)
- ✎ Strengthen and scale up entrepreneurship programs for women, offering financial assistance, mentorship, and access to markets, while reducing bureaucratic barriers to entry (employment bureaus, ministries for entrepreneurship, crafts, tourism and environment)
- ✎ Develop social safety nets specifically designed to support women in vulnerable employment, mitigating the impact of economic fluctuations (employment bureaus)
- ✎ Strengthen enforcement of labour legislation prohibiting gender discrimination and sexual harassment by increasing oversight, training inspectors, and establishing anonymous reporting mechanisms guided by the standards of the International Labor Organization Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) (entity administrations for inspection supervision)
- ✎ Require all employers, particularly in sectors with poor working conditions, to adopt and implement workplace policies on harassment, equal treatment, and safety (Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Protection RS, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy FBiH)
- ✎ Introduce temporary special measures, such as quotas or incentives, to increase the representation of women in senior and middle management positions. (Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Protection RS, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy FBiH)
- ✎ Encourage employers to adopt gender-sensitive policies and practices by providing recognition or incentives for businesses that promote workplace equality (Ministry of Labor, War Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Protection RS, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy FBiH)

The labour market presents a nuanced picture of participation and vulnerability with a very visible gender dimension. In 2023, the **labour force participation rates indicate a significant gender disparity**, with 40.5% for women compared to 59.9% for men. Different indices confirm this and UNDP Human Development Index value for BIH in 2021 is lower for women than for men (0.754 and 0.802, respectively). The gender pay gap persisted at 9.8% in 2022. According to ILO, in the last 5 years the activity rate for women has shown a consistent upward trend rising from 33% in 2019 to 45% in 2023<sup>38</sup>.

Women own 23.7% of all businesses, which is under the Europe and Central Asia average of 34.2%. Access to the labour market for persons with disabilities, especially women, Roma women, women victims of domestic violence, and other marginalized groups of women is particularly challenging. Research suggests that only 21 percent of women with disabilities are employed.

38 ILOSTAT. (n.d.). Database on employment and labor force. ILOSTAT Web Service.  
[https://rplumber.ilo.org/data/indicator/?id=EAP\\_DWAP\\_SEX\\_AGE\\_RT\\_A&type=label&format=csv](https://rplumber.ilo.org/data/indicator/?id=EAP_DWAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A&type=label&format=csv)

Roma women face extreme levels of economic vulnerability<sup>39</sup> – 55 percent of Roma women are without completed primary education; 80 percent never accessed active employment programs and 90 percent never accessed retraining programs.

Discrimination is prohibited with the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination and the Law on Gender Equality. Labor legislation defines specific protections to employed women during pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, and sexual harassment is criminalised. Despite legal guarantees, data shows that most respondents perceive that the prevalence of discrimination is highest in the labour market and data indicates that most cases of discrimination in employment have been adjudicated by courts. Compared to the EU, where women spend an average of 3.5 hours a day in unpaid household activities, women in BiH spend 7 hours. While the state and entity governments have adopted rules to prevent workplace harassment in the public sector, only RS has extended these measures to the private sector.

BiH has introduced substantial enforcement of minimum wage policy through law and collective agreements. Research suggests that increasing the minimum wage in BiH has a significant positive effect on poverty reduction but a limited effect on income inequality<sup>40</sup>.

In addition to these problems, **vulnerable employment**<sup>41</sup>, characterized by the lack of formal work arrangements, social protection, and safety nets, further exacerbates these challenges. In 2022, 21.5% of women were engaged in vulnerable employment, higher than the 17.2% recorded for men<sup>42</sup>.

**Active labour market policy measures** appear to be the primary policy in BiH, followed by support for start-ups and entrepreneurship. Despite the high inactivity rates, women remain below 50% of beneficiaries of these funds. In FBiH, specific earmarked programs targeting women are in place, whereas RS lacks similar programs, though there is no significant difference in their impact on women. The active labour measures seem to have structural flaws and studies have found that their overall impact is limited due to insufficient **funding for essential training programs, and a lack of personalized support mechanisms and provide only limited incentives for mobility and inclusion of women in the labour market, particularly women from vulnerable groups**<sup>43</sup>.

*"If a woman gets a job through the Employment Bureau, the job lasts only as long as the project does. Maybe a month more, and then it's gone," says a woman from Višegrad.*

Many women experience different treatment at work due to their gender, despite legal prohibitions against discrimination and harassment. Specific measures to prevent sexual harassment were adopted for the judiciary in 2015<sup>44</sup>, state level institutions in 2019<sup>45</sup>, the institutions in FBiH in 2022<sup>46</sup> and a specific law on harassment was adopted in RS in 2021<sup>47</sup>

39 Đuderija, S. (2023). Izvještaj o stanju prava i položaja Romkinja u Bosni i Hercegovini [Report on the Situation of Rights and Position of Roma Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina].

40 Kurta, A. & Oruc, N. (2020). The effect of increasing the minimum wage on poverty and inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Economic Annals*. 65. 121-137. 10.2298/EKA2026121K.

41 International Labour Organization. (2018, June 16). Paid employment vs vulnerable employment. ILOSTAT. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/4a115UV](https://bit.ly/4a115UV)

42 Trading Economics. (2024, March 28). Vulnerable employment, female (% of female employment) [Data file]. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/49uunW2](https://bit.ly/49uunW2)

43 RCC. (2022). Women employment study of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regional Cooperation Council. Retrieved from <https://www.esap.online/docs/186/rcc-esap-2-women-employment-study-for-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

44 HJPC (2015). Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-based Harassment within the Judicial Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina

45 Guide for Effective Measures Against Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment in the BiH Institutions

46 Policy of Zero Tolerance for Harassment

47 The Law on Protection Against Workplace Harassment of Republika Srpska

## 3.4 Health & human security

### Recommendations

- ↘ Develop targeted initiatives to address financial, geographical, and transportation barriers to healthcare, with a focus on women, persons with disabilities, and residents of underserved areas (Health Insurance Fund of RS, Health Insurance and Reinsurance Institute of FBiH)
- ↘ Equip health institutions with accessible facilities, such as specialized gynaecological tables and counselling services, and provide training for healthcare staff to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities (Health Insurance Fund of RS, Health Insurance and Reinsurance Institute of FBiH)
- ↘ Establish clear protocols and accountability measures in maternity wards to prevent obstetric violence, accompanied by training for healthcare staff on respectful maternal care practices (Health Insurance Fund of RS, Health Insurance and Reinsurance Institute of FBiH)
- ↘ Allocate resources to expand access to preventive care and diagnostic services, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, to promote early detection and overall health equality (Health Insurance Fund of RS, Health Insurance and Reinsurance Institute of FBiH)

Inadequate access to healthcare stands as a critical factor of vulnerability in contemporary societies worldwide. As a fundamental human right, access to healthcare not only ensures individual well-being but also plays a pivotal role in determining the overall health and resilience of communities. The significance of this issue reverberates across various dimensions of human existence, from economic stability to social justice and beyond<sup>48</sup>.

**In BiH, 9% of GDP allocated to healthcare, a significant figure for its economic status, yet healthcare spending per capita is substantially below the European Union (EU) average.**<sup>49</sup> Current estimates<sup>50</sup> suggest that only 78% of the population of Republika Srpska and 86% of the population of the Federation of BiH are covered by health insurance. Health care is provided by both public and private facilities and is reimbursed through both public funds and private out-of-pocket payments.

**Reports from various local communities indicate that obstetric violence<sup>51</sup> and corruption<sup>52</sup>** is a concerning issue affecting many women<sup>53</sup>. This form of violence, often manifested as physical, verbal, or emotional abuse, occurs within healthcare settings before, during or after childbirth, leaving lasting psychological and physical scars on mothers.

### Healthy Communities in BiH: Promoting Better Health for All

The Healthy Communities in BiH project aims to reduce the burden of disease and improve health outcomes by focusing on prevention and promoting healthier lifestyles. Prioritizing vulnerable and socially excluded groups, the project ensures accessible and sustainable health services for all.

Key outcomes include empowered citizens advocating for health, municipalities taking active roles in health promotion, and collaboration between health and non-health authorities to implement impactful reforms. Over a million citizens will benefit from improved public health services. Together, we are leaving no one behind.

48 Clark, B., & Preto, N. (2018). Exploring the concept of vulnerability in health care. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 190(11), E308-E309

49 Osmanović-Pašić, Z., & Nora, L. (2022, November 11). Working towards people-centered health care in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *World Bank blogs*. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3vFfwdz](https://bit.ly/3vFfwdz)

50 Cf. supra note 54

51 The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers that obstetric violence falls within the remit of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and that governments that have ratified the Convention are under a human rights obligation to tackle this form of violence against women S.F.M. v. Spain. CEDAW/C/75/D/138/2018. Communication number(s): 138/2018. Author: S.F.M. Type of decision: Decision on merits. Session No. 75

52 Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection. (2023, October 10). 52 Women Accuse Doctors of Violence and Corruption in Bosnian Maternity Wards. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3xlw6jg](https://bit.ly/3xlw6jg)

53 Slobodna Evropa. (2023, September 21). Podnesene 52 krivične prijave protiv medicinara u Zenici za nasilje na porodu [News article]. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3vu6zE0](https://bit.ly/3vu6zE0), Udruženje "Baby Steps". (n.d.). Pregled iskustva po porodilištima [Overview of Experiences in Maternity Wards]. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3VLOZWI](https://bit.ly/3VLOZWI) <https://babysteps.ba/iskustva/pregled-iskustava-po-porodilistima/>

**Access to preventive and diagnostic services is a significant challenge, especially for women and marginalized groups.** Financial, geographical, and transportation barriers severely limit access to healthcare. Access to healthcare presents significant challenges for persons with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both in urban and rural settings. The laws of both entities require increased accessibility to buildings, health services, education, and transportation for persons with disabilities, but the enforcement of the requirements varied throughout the country. Still most primary healthcare facilities lack physical accessibility, rendering healthcare services largely unreachable for individuals with disabilities<sup>54</sup>.

Access to healthcare presents significant challenges for persons with disabilities in BiH, both in urban and rural settings. According to a survey conducted by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka, as many as 41% of health institutions reported that their staff is insufficiently or only partially trained to work with women with disabilities and more than half had no special gynaecological table and more than two thirds had no support mechanism for women with disabilities, such as counselling services<sup>55</sup>.

### 3.5 Environment & human security

#### Recommendations

- ↘ Ensure that climate change policies in BiH explicitly integrate gender perspectives (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations BiH)
- ↘ Create programs that empower women to take leadership roles in environmental governance and advocacy (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations BiH)
- ↘ Support women groups which advocate against climate change and for environment protection and promote their impact and provide support in cases of legal actions targeting these groups (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Environment and Tourism of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology of the Republika Srpska, Department for Spatial Planning and Property and Legal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- ↘ Raise awareness to highlight the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental degradation on women (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Environment and Tourism of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology of the Republika Srpska, Department for Spatial Planning and Property and Legal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- ↘ Promote participatory approaches to climate adaptation, such as community-led reforestation projects, water management initiatives, and sustainable agriculture practices (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Environment and Tourism of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology of the Republika Srpska, Department for Spatial Planning and Property and Legal Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

54 My rights. "The Alternative Report on the Implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." 2019. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3U5hOMv](https://bit.ly/3U5hOMv)

55 Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka. (2020, February). Access of Women with Disabilities in BiH to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Parenting Planning: Situation Analysis.

The convergence of climate change, pollution, and nature loss poses significant challenges to human rights and security, affecting core aspects such as food security, health, and the right to life. The interconnection between climate change and the WPS Agenda is crucial but often overlooked.<sup>56</sup> Recognizing women's role in addressing security threats is paramount, yet current policies often fail to acknowledge the gender dimensions of climate change, further marginalizing women. Research highlights the **disproportionate impact of climate change on women**, particularly in developing countries, where they bear the brunt of unsustainable resource use and environmental degradation.

BiH's vulnerability to climate change is exacerbated by its geographical location and economic reliance on agriculture and forestry. For example, these sectors contribute 5.6% to the GDP of BiH, employ nearly 20% of its workforce, and are crucial for rural development. In BiH, about 20% of women and 16% of men are formally employed in agriculture. In addition, there is a high rate of informal work in the agricultural sector, where much of the day-to-day farm work is therefore performed by women, with contributions from other family members. In situations of accidents and disasters, due to patriarchal patterns, women are prone to being more exposed to unpaid labour. Within the legal mechanisms, gender equality is notably lacking, especially concerning agricultural subsidies or other similar incentives. Most households are managed by men who receive agricultural or other subsidies during reconstruction (seeds, greenhouses, machinery, etc.).

Women are prominent campaigners against climate change globally, not only because they are more vulnerable to climate change to a greater extent (due to the gender inequalities), but also because they may have a different sense of what constitutes a bigger climate risk than men,<sup>57</sup> including in BiH, where environmental activism is gaining momentum. For example, 39% of women in BiH consider the environment more important than, for example, the economy.<sup>58</sup>

However, a concerning trend in BiH is the targeted violence against environmental activists, with a significant number being women. Environmental justice activists face various challenges and risks in their pursuit of environmental justice in places like Ubork, Konjic and Mostar. These challenges include social stigma, legal challenges such as SLAPP lawsuits. Documented cases have shown instances of legal harassment, physical assaults, and property vandalism targeting activists, with women disproportionately affected.

### Women NGOs Leading Environment Protection: Brave Women of Kruščica

In patriarchal BiH, the women of Kruščica defied norms to protect their river from hydropower projects. Starting in 2017, they blocked a bridge for 500 days, enduring harsh winters and police violence.

Their activism not only saved the river but also empowered women, leading to six activists being elected to the local council. Their efforts earned global recognition, including the 2019 EuroNatur Award and the 2021 Goldman Environmental Prize.

The "Brave Women of Kruščica" inspire movements across the Balkans, showcasing the power of grassroots activism in protecting nature and challenging societal norms.

<sup>56</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, UN Women, UNDP, & UNDP/PA/PSO. (2020). Gender, Climate & Security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change.

<sup>57</sup> OECD. (2021). Gender and the Environment: Building Evidence and Policies to Achieve the SDGs (Chapter 4: Women and the Environmental Action Movement) [E-book]. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/3xlue9X](https://bit.ly/3xlue9X).

<sup>58</sup> Strambo, C., Rahmati Abkenar, M., Solujić, S., & Del Duca, L. (2023, April 14). Environmental attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina: trends and strategies going forward. SEI Perspectives. (04.04.2024) from [bit.ly/4cMVcre](https://bit.ly/4cMVcre)

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

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The **Women, Peace, and Security** agenda has demonstrated its transformative potential in fostering gender equality and inclusive security frameworks. Over 15 years of implementation in BiH, significant progress has been made, including increased representation of women in peacekeeping missions, advancements in legislative and institutional frameworks, and the integration of gender perspectives in security and governance. However, persistent challenges underscore the need for sustained commitment.

BiH's 1325 NAPs have served as a model for the region, showcasing innovative approaches to integrating gender equality in post-conflict societies. The country's engagement with the WPS agenda highlights the importance of aligning international commitments with national priorities, particularly in addressing the legacy of conflict-related sexual violence.

Despite notable achievements, gaps remain in funding, coordination, and the localization of action plans. Efforts to combat stigma, ensure justice for CRSV survivors, and expand women's participation in decision-making, are essential for further progress. Human security challenges, including domestic violence, economic insecurity, and limited healthcare access, remain critical concerns. Many women lack trust in institutional responses, and data on these issues is fragmented. An intersectional analysis reveals that women from marginalized groups face compounded vulnerabilities, requiring tailored interventions. Additionally, the absence of a fully developed human security concept in BiH highlights the need for integrated approaches to address these challenges.

This milestone reaffirms the critical role of women as agents of change in peacebuilding and governance. A continued focus on inclusive security strategies, multi-sectoral collaboration, and community-based solutions will ensure that BiH sustains its leadership in advancing the WPS agenda, creating a more equitable and secure future for all.

Looking ahead, the pathways for change—including capacity building, enhanced collaboration, and amplifying women's roles and narratives—provide a roadmap for achieving the desired outcomes. These strategies, rooted in local realities and supported by promising practices, will contribute to a more inclusive and effective WPS agenda, fostering peace and security for all women in BiH.



